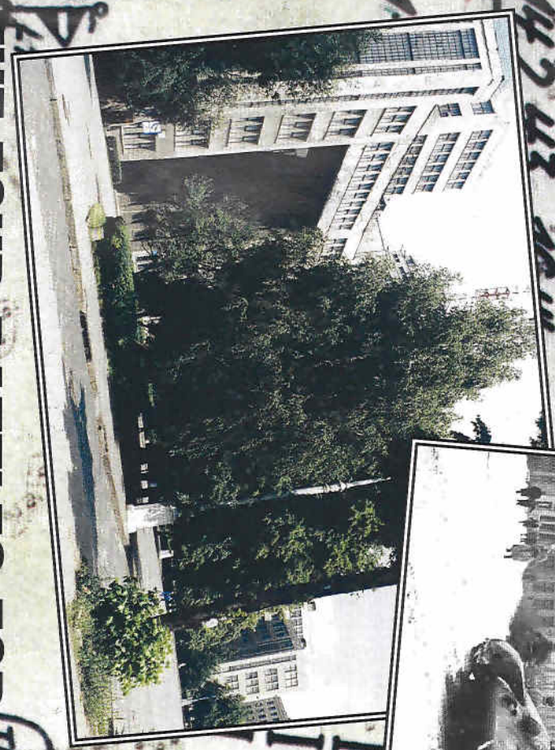
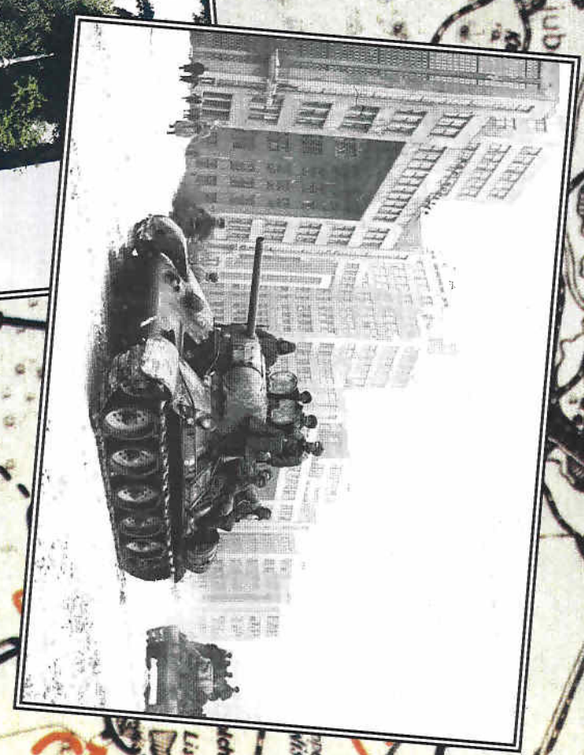
AFTER THE BATTLE





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KHARKOV

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Front Cover: In 1941-43 on the Eastern Front, the Ukrainian city of Kharkov changed hands four times. *Inset:* Red Army T-34s pass the Gosprom, symbol of Kharkov, after the Soviets' first recapture of the city in February 1943. The maps shows the German defensive positions on February 14, 1943, two days before they evacuated the city for the first time. (Novosti/Karel Margry)

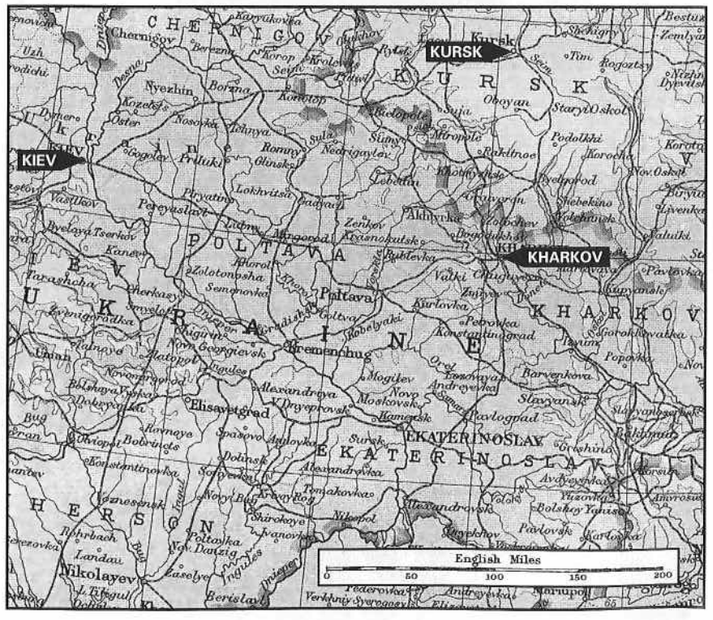
Centre Pages: Memorial to the Red Army's second and final liberation of the city in August 1943: T-34 tank on the square beside the Kharkov Historical Museum. (Karel Margry)

Back Cover: Modern-day gun turret of Battery Maxim Gorkii I, defending the city of Sevastopol on the Crimea, which was captured by the Germans after heavy fighting in June 1942. (Svein Wiiger Olsen)

Acknowledgements: The Editor extends his appreciation to Anatoly A. Yankovsky, director of the Kharkov Historical Museum, and to Konstantin E. Rakitjansky, staff photographer of the museum, for their assistance with the Kharkov story. He would especially like to thank Martin Bogaert, without whose knowledge of the Russian language and organising talents the trip to Kharkov would have been impossible. Others who helped were Marco Cillessen and Koen Vanhabost. For help with the Maxim Gorkii I story, the Editor thanks Hans Sakkers.

Photo Credits: BA — Bundesarchiv; NIOD — Nederlands Instituut voor Oorlogsdocumentatie, Amsterdam.

Situated in the north-eastern Ukraine, Kharkov lies some 500 miles south of Moscow and 260 miles east of Kiev. Today a metropolis of nearly two million inhabitants, it was already a major city of over 300,000 by the time of the 1917 revolution. From 1919 to 1934 Kharkov was the capital of the Ukraine Soviet Republic. One of the most widely known edifices of modern Kharkov, built in the 1930s, is the Gosprom (House of State Industry) complex on Dzerzhinsky Square, itself said to be the largest square in Europe. During the Second World War, Kharkov changed hands four times, each battle finding its apotheosis on this square. This aerial of the Gosprom was taken on February 16, 1943 — the day on which the Red Army recaptured Kharkov for the first time. (Novosti)



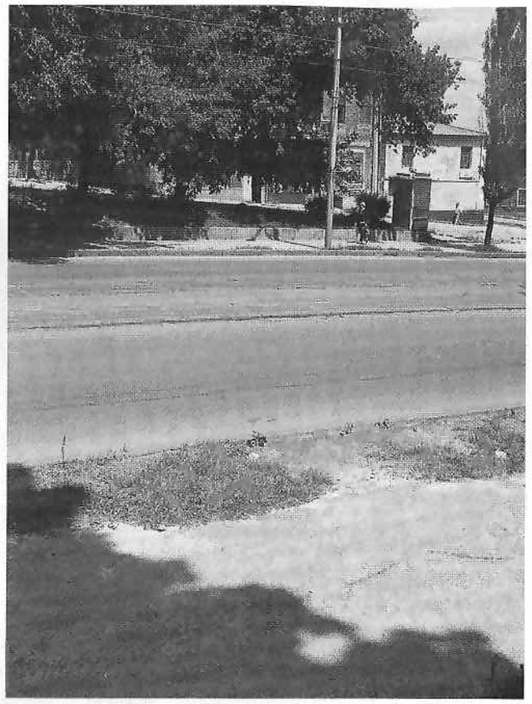
KHARKOV

By Karel Margry

Kharkov is the second city of the Ukraine after the capital Kiev and the fourth largest city in the whole of the former Soviet Union. Founded in 1654 at the confluence of the Kharkov and Lopan rivers, and a nodal point of the roads from Moscow, Leningrad and Kiev to the Crimea and the Caucasus, the city soon became an administrative, military and economic centre. Already a place of trade, crafts and education in the 19th century, the heavy industrialisation of the 1920s and 1930s made Kharkov one of the main industrial cities of the Soviet Union. Giant plants and factories were set up producing tractors, machine tools, ball-bearings, turbo-generators and, not least, military equipment; Kharkov was, and still is today, a main centre of Russian tank development and production. The huge Gosprom complex of buildings on Dzerzhinsky Square in the heart of the city, housing planning offices and technical institutes, became the symbol of modern Kharkov. In 1939 the city had a population of about 830,000. A strategic prize, Kharkov suffered heavily in the Second World War, changing hands four times between October 1941 and August 1943.

Top: **A few days earlier, a Luftwaffe photographer took this picture of one of the larger squares in the city centre. (ECPArmées)**

Above: **Our comparison taken from a third-floor office window overlooking what is today called Constitution Square.**



Left: **Kharkov first fell to the Germans on October 24, 1941, the 57. Infanterie-Division taking it after fierce street-fighting. Kriegsberichter (war reporter) Reindl photographed men of the division passing through one of the barricades which blocked Sverdlov Street, the main road into the city from the west. (NIOD)** *Right:* **This is the same spot today.**

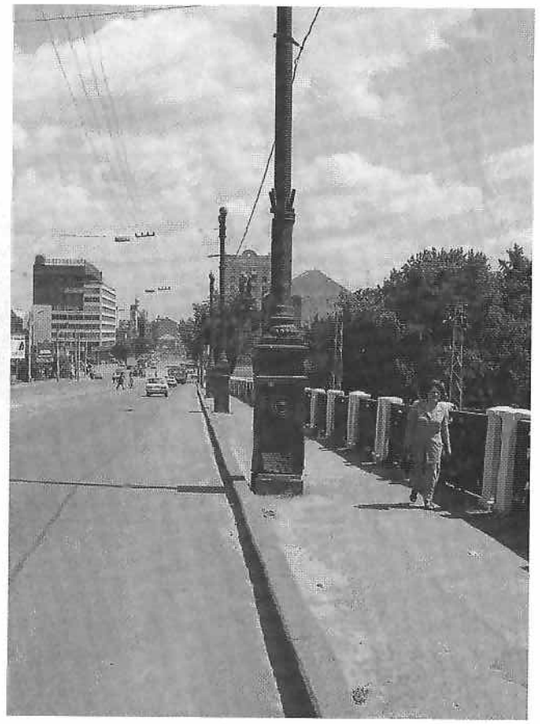
THE FIRST BATTLE (OCTOBER 1941)

The first battle for Kharkov occurred in the end phase of Operation 'Barbarossa', the German invasion of the Soviet Union started on June 22, 1941. By the end of September, Heeresgruppe Süd of Generalfeldmarschall Gerd von Rundstedt, the southernmost of the three German army groups employed in the attack, had encircled and destroyed 650,000 Russians in the giant pocket east of Kiev. Ordered to continue the offensive, Rundstedt re-arranged his armies. In the line from north to south, he had 6. Armee of Generalfeldmarschall Walter von Reichenau, directed to advance on Belgorod and Kharkov; 17. Armee, now under Generaloberst Hermann Hoth, aiming for Voroshilovgrad and the northern Donetz river; Panzergruppe 1 (by now renamed 1. Panzer-Armee) of Generaloberst Ewald von Kleist, moving on Rostov on the Don, the gateway to the Caucasus; and 11. Armee of Generaloberst Erich von Manstein, with Rumanian forces under command, assaulting the Crimea peninsula.

With Stalin having ordered the Soviet South-Western Front (Marshal Seman K. Timoshenko) and Southern Front (now commanded by Marshal Cherevichenko) over to a strict defence, Heeresgruppe Süd rolled south-east and south making good speed.

Another Kriegsberichter, Schmidt, photographed the same barricade. Ahead lies the bridge across the main railway through Kharkov. (NIOD)

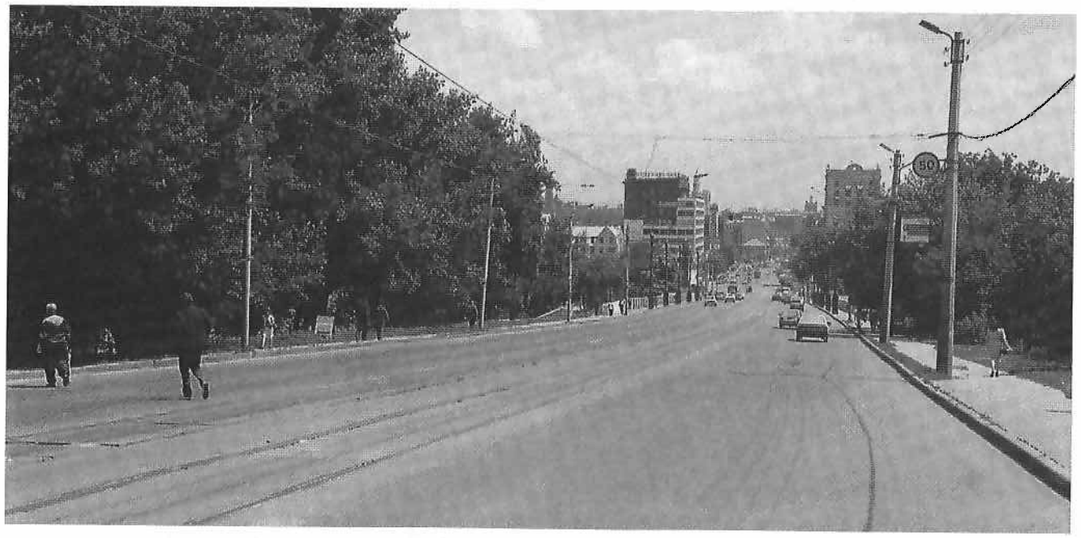
A third Kriegsberichter, Mittelstaedt, pictured troops making their way across the broken viaduct. (NIOD)



The bridge was blown up later in the war (see page 41), and its replacement has columns of a different design.

Reichenau's 6. Armee, operating on the extreme northern flank of the army group, had orders to keep in touch with Heeresgruppe Mitte to the north. However, with the former aiming directly east for Moscow, and Hitler directing 6. Armee and 17. Armee more and more south-eastward in order to support 1. Panzer-Armee's spearheads moving on Rostov, this proved increasingly difficult. Reichenau was forced to continuously extend his front, until it stretched to more than 150 miles. Rundstedt repeatedly warned Hitler that a widening gap was opening between the two diverging army groups, presenting the enemy with an ideal opportunity for counter-attack.

The German advance was now more hampered by the vagaries of the Russian climate than by Russian opposition. From October 6, the weather had worsened, the autumn rain and snow soon turning the Russian soil into seas of mud, which halted all motorised and horse-drawn traffic and made supplying the armies virtually impossible. By October 11, both 6. Armee and 17. Armee had come to a standstill in the quagmires and rain storms. Only after the 17th, when night frost hardened the roads, could the advance be resumed, albeit now increasingly hindered by snow storms and extreme cold — winter conditions for which the German troops were insufficiently equipped.



Today, there are only the pot-holes to slow down traffic on Sverdlov Street.

Above: **Kriegsberichter Reindl moved with the forward troops and photographed StuG IIIs supporting the infantry at the eastern end of Sverdlov Street. The assault guns are turning right because the bridge across the Lopan river just in front of them, which gives access to the city centre, has been blown. (NIOD)** *Right:* **The rebuilt Lopan bridge.**

Despite the mobilisation of new units, all attempts by Timoshenko — whose front now consisted (from north to south) of the 40th, 21st, 38th and 6th Armies — to build up a defence west of Kharkov failed. On October 22, the LV. Armeekorps of Reichenau's 6. Armee gained two bridgeheads across the Una river two miles south-west and three miles south of the city, capturing an intact road bridge at the latter place. The following day they broke through the Russian lines west of the city, reaching the western and south-western suburbs. The fighting in front of Kharkov caused heavy Russian casualties and the Stavka (Soviet High Command) ordered Timoshenko to fall back to behind the Donetz to straighten and shorten his line. His 38th Army (now under General Maslov) evacuated Kharkov, leaving rear guards which still put up a dogged resistance. On October 24, the 57. Infanterie-Division of LV. Armeekorps took Kharkov. The following day, the 239. and 294. Infanterie-Divisions of the adjacent XVII. Armeekorps cleared the northern suburbs.

Evidence of the fierce street fighting is clearly visible in this picture by Kriegsberichter Herber, taken on Ploshchad Proletarskaya (Proletariat Square) on November 11. (NIOD)

Sixty years later, and all war damage has been repaired. The Univermag department store on the left still has the same lettering on the facade.

Above: **German soldiers of a horse-drawn column gaze with curiosity at the modern architecture of the Gosprom complex on Dzerzhinsky Square. The building on the right has been ravaged by fire, a victim of Stalin's 'scorched earth' ukase. Picture by PK photographer Schmidt. (NIOD)** *Below:* **This is the southern wing of the Gosprom.**

A German propaganda picture to show the 'modern palace of industry'. This is one of two identical passages cutting through the Gosprom block. (NIOD)

However, the slowing down of the German movement by the weather had given the Russians sufficient time to dismantle, evacuate or destroy nearly all of Kharkov's factories, workshops and industrial equipment. Stalin's 'scorched earth' policy had been carried out with great efficiency. Many buildings were on fire as the Germans entered Kharkov.

By late October the Donetz Basin, the industrial heartland of the Soviet Union to the south-east of Kharkov, had been completely overrun. In November, Heeresgruppe Süd ground to a halt along the line of the Donetz and Mius rivers on account of the weather, the failing supply system and hardening Soviet resistance. A final attack secured Rostov, but that was the end. Any further continuation of the offensive to the Caucasus would have to wait until the next spring.

Gebirgsjäger (mountain troops) march across Dzerzhinsky Square. PK Reindl apparently stayed on in Kharkov after the battle for he took this picture on December 24, two months after the German capture of the city. (NIOD)

Left: **Kharkov under Nazi occupation. A SdKfz 250 half-track patrols the streets. (NIOD)** *Right:* **What in Soviet days was Ploshchad Sovietkoi Ukrainy (Square of the Ukrainian Council) is today Ploshchad Konstitutii (Constitution Square).**

The same half-track passing a StuG III on the same square. (Novosti)

Today Ploshchad Konstitutii houses many of Kharkov's new businesses.

Kharkov now began its first period under Nazi occupation, a period which would last 15 months. Because of its continued proximity to the front, Kharkov and the surrounding region never became part of the Reichskommissariat Ukraine (the German civilian occupation authority set up in the western Ukraine), remaining under German military administration throughout its periods of German occupation.

Immediately after capture of the city, the staff of LV. Armeekorps assumed the function of Stadtkommandant, using the 57. Infanterie-Division as security force. The commander of the 57. Infanterie-Division, Generalmajor Anton Dostler, acted as Stadtkommandant until December 13, when control of Kharkov passed to the Heeresgebiet (army group rear area) and he was succeeded as Stadtkommandant by Generalleutnant Alfred von Puttkamer. Administration of the city was the joint responsibility of the Stadtkommandantur and of Feldkommandantur 757.

On October 10, the 6. Armee commander had issued an order (it would gain notoriety as the 'Reichenau-Befehl') in which he called upon his soldiers to 'completely destroy the Bolshevist false doctrine, the Soviet state and its armed forces' and to 'mercilessly exterminate the asiatic-Jewish danger'. Prompted by this order, the Kharkov Stadtkommandantur initiated a reign of terror against the civilian population of the city. Special squads hunted for communists, party and state officials, political commissars and Jews. Anyone suspected of being a partisan, spy or saboteur was arrested.

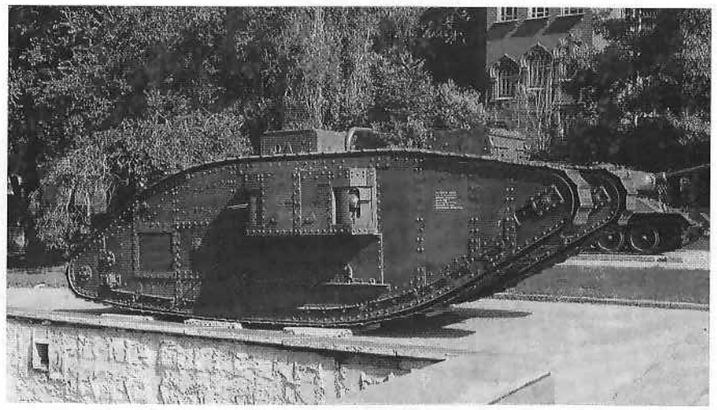
Early on November 14, several buildings in the city were blown up by explosive time-charges left behind by the Red Army. One of them killed the commander and staff of the 60. Infanterie-Division. The Germans reacted by arresting some 200 civilians, mostly Jews, and hanging them from the balconies of large buildings. They also took about 1,000 hostages which were interned in the Hotel International on Dzerzhinsky Square. Any act of resistance or sabotage was retaliated with more public hangings. (General Dostler would be tried and executed by the US Army in 1945 for war crimes committed against US personnel in northern Italy in March 1944 — see *After the Battle* No. 94.)

On December 14, the Stadtkommandant ordered that the entire Jewish population of the city was to be concentrated in a hut settlement of the Kharkov tractor works just outside the city. In two days, 20,000 Jews moved house to this concentration camp. One of the SS special murder squads operating behind the front lines — Sonderkommando 4a of Einsatzgruppe C — shot the first of them in December, the rest were killed in lorries equipped as gas chambers the following month.

One goal of the German expansion to the East was the economic exploitation of the Ukraine. A major part of the region's rich food resources was confiscated for use by the Wehrmacht or shipped off to feed the population of the Reich. This created acute food shortages in the Ukraine, especially in big cities like Kharkov. By January 1942 about one-third of the 300,000 people then remaining in the city showed signs of starvation; many died of hunger. Such was German rule in occupied Kharkov.

Left: **On December 8, six weeks after the battle, Soviet road barricades were still in place. This is Sumskaya Ulitsa (Sumy Street), the main thoroughfare leading into Kharkov from the north, at its junction with Bursatskil Slope in the heart of the city. (NIOD)** *Right:* **The same crossroads today. The Kharkov Historical Museum is just outside the picture off to the left.**

Kharkov's first winter under German rule. Snow is falling as a German Feldgendarmerie directs traffic on Proletariat Square. Signs posts point the way in German. On the left stands a British Mark IV tank, Kharkov's memorial to the First World War (Britain supplied a considerable number of tanks to Russia in 1916-19). The picture was taken by PK Hähle on November 11, 1941. (NIOD)



Today the same Mark IV stands on the square beside the Kharkov Historical Museum, next to a T-34 and other Second World War relics. For a comparison of the picture above see overleaf.

Above: **Fifteen months later, February 1943, and the Second Battle for Kharkov is about to begin. A Luftwaffe photographer took this shot of German transport crossing the bridge across the Lopan on Sverdlov Street — the same span that we saw in demolished state on page 6. (ECPArmées)** *Below:* **The Lopan bridge today. On the far side the multi-windowed building in front of Uspenskii Cathedral has gone.**

THE SECOND BATTLE (JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1943)

On May 12, 1942, Timoshenko's South-Western Front launched a counter-offensive with five armies against Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock's Heeresgruppe B which aimed at recapturing Kharkov with hopes of pushing on to Kiev. Although Soviet spearheads breached the German line at several places, and made rapid progress, notably south of Kharkov where they advanced westward from the Izyum salient, the Germans quickly recovered from their initial surprise, hastened reinforcements to the area and counter-attacked on the 17th. By the 23rd, they had cut off and encircled the Soviet armies south of Kharkov and pushed the one that had broken through north-east of Kharkov back across the Donetz. When the battle ended on May 28, they had taken 239,000 Russians prisoner, captured 1,200 tanks and 2,000 guns, and shot down 500 Soviet aircraft. Although Soviet historiography calls this failed offensive 'the second battle for Kharkov', it is disregarded here as the fighting never got close to Kharkov city itself.

The real second battle for Kharkov, and the first recapture of the city by the Russians, occurred in the wake of the German defeat at Stalingrad. The Red Army reconquered Kharkov on February 16, 1943 — 14 days after all German forces trapped in the Stalingrad pocket had surrendered. The Soviet counter-stroke to Kharkov had begun a month earlier.

On the morning of January 13 — with the 6. Armee safely bottled up at Stalingrad — the Soviets launched their new winter offensive in the Ukraine. The Stavka planned to liberate the region and entomb an estimated 75 German divisions there. Lined up from north to south stood four Soviet army groups: Bryansk Front, Voronezh Front, South-Western Front and Southern Front. Opposing them were Heeresgruppe B, now under Generaloberst Maximilian von Weichs, and Heeresgruppe Don under Generalfeldmarschall Erich von Manstein.

The offensive was opened by Voronezh Front under Lieutenant-General F. I. Golikov which hit the left flank of Heeresgruppe B along the line of the Don river. In the first assault, its 40th Army (Lieutenant-General K. S. Moskalenko) broke through the left flank of the Hungarian 2nd Army. Although the German 2. Armee, adjacent to the north, hastily screened its southern flank to protect Voronezh, the Soviet 3rd Tank Army (Lieutenant-General P. S. Rybalko) pushed behind the Hungarian VII Corps, the Italian Alpini Corps and a German provisional corps from the south causing their front to disintegrate. Further south, spearheads of 1st Guards Army (Lieutenant-General V. I. Kuznetsov) drove across the Aydar river and crossed the Donetz west of Voroshilovgrad. By January 25, a 200-mile gap had been torn in the Heeresgruppe B front between Voronezh and Voroshilovgrad.

Looking the other way, back up Sverdlov Street. A KHD S-3000 supply truck of the SS-Panzerkorps. (ECPArmées)

Only Russian transport on the road today. The able staff of the Kharkov Historical Museum found these comparisons for us.

The same Luftwaffe photographer took this photograph of Proletariat Square, which combines several features already seen in earlier shots. On the left is the Lopan bridge leading into Sverdlov Street. On the right is the Univermag store. The Mark IV tank memorial is hidden by the multi-windowed building (now gutted and roofless) to the left of it. (ECPArmées)

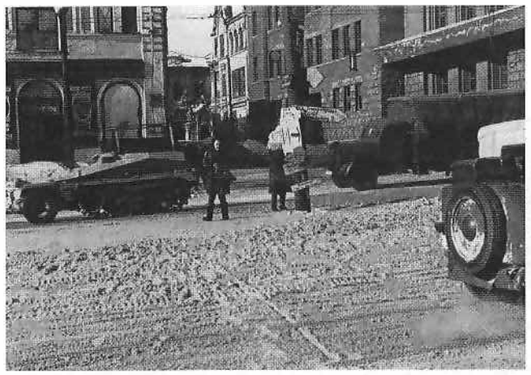
On that day, the Russians extended their offensive northwards. Moskalenko's 40th Army broke through 2. Armee's lightly-held south flank and next morning 13th Army (Lieutenant-General N. P. Pukhov) of Bryansk Front under Lieutenant-General M. A. Reuter struck the 2. Armee in the north. In a couple of days, two of its three corps were encircled. While they struggled to break out, the 2. Armee had only one weak panzer division with which to block the Soviet westward advance. The Russian offensive was now in full swing. While Reuter's Bryansk Front bore west towards Kursk, Golikov's Voronezh Front pushed towards Kharkov.

Meanwhile, further south, the two other Soviet army groups were attacking Manstein's Heeresgruppe Don. South-Western Front under Lieutenant-General N. F. Vatutin, scheduled to make the main effort, struck for the middle reaches of the Donetz and Southern Front under General I. Malinovskii applied pressure from the east.

Heeresgruppe Don had orders to stay put on the Donetz river and east of Rostov in order to protect the rear of Generalfeldmarschall von Kleist's Heeresgruppe A in the Caucasus. Faced with the new offensive, Kleist wanted to evacuate his troops through Rostov before it was too late, but Hitler was unwilling to approve and delayed a decision. Manstein repeatedly asked what was going to be done to relieve the pressure on his left flank. On January 27, Hitler allowed one of Kleist's armies, the 1. Panzer-Armee of Generaloberst Eberhard von Mackensen, to pull back through Rostov and reinforce Heeresgruppe Don, and at the same time promised a counter-attack from the vicinity of Kharkov by a newly-activated headquarters, the SS-Panzerkorps under SS-Obergruppenführer Paul Hausser, consisting of the SS-Panzergrenadier-Divisions 'Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler' (LSSAH) and 'Das Reich', all recently arrived from France.

On January 29, Vatutin's South-Western Front renewed its offensive. Three days later, the Heeresgruppe B line south of the Donetz collapsed and a new 'Front Mobile Group' under Lieutenant-General M. M. Popov, with four tank corps and one rifle corps, moved into the 40-mile gap, crossed the river and headed west toward Slavyansk, aiming to slice the German escape route from the Donbas. North of the Donetz, Heeresgruppe B turned over the scattered units of its southern half — XXIV. Panzerkorps and Korps Cramer, with the equivalent of six weak infantry divisions, the remnants of five more divisions, Panzergrenadier-Division 'Grossdeutschland' and one regiment of 'Das Reich' — over to Armee-Abteilung Lanz (General der Gebirgstruppen Hubert Lanz), giving it the impossible mission of protecting Kharkov and the northern flank of Heeresgruppe Don.

The same panorama today, pictured from the third floor of a very hectic municipal office. The church in the background is the Blagoveshenskii Cathedral.



Left: **A SdKfz 250/3 radio half-track rattles past on Sovietskoi Ukrainy Square. Note the direction sign with the divisional emblem of the SS-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Das Reich'. Although this series of pictures is undated, this sign, together with the still-frozen snow, is a certain clue that it was taken about February 1943. ('Das Reich' did not arrive in Russia until late January 1943, thaw set in in early March, and by next winter, 1943-44, Kharkov was long since back in Russian hands.) (ECPArmées)** *Right:* **The same pedestrian's crossing on what is today Constitution Square.**

Intent on a counter-offensive, on February 3 Hitler ordered Hausser's SS-Panzerkorps to advance with 'Das Reich' and elements of the 'Leibstandarte' out of the area south of Kharkov to Kupyansk and then strike south in the rear of the advancing Russians. However, this was an unrealistic plan as both divisions were already committed, digging in for defence east and north-east of Kharkov.

On February 5, the 1st Guards Army took Izyum, in the deep left rear of Heeresgruppe Don, threatening to cut the German army group's supply lines. In an emergency meeting with von Manstein at the FHQ at Rastenburg on the 6th, Hitler reluctantly gave him permission to withdraw 4. Armee (Generaloberst Hoth) and Armee-Abteilung Hollidt (General der Infanterie Karl Hollidt) 45-100 miles westward to behind the Mius river. The retreat began on February 8. By the 18th, both armies had crossed the Mius and occupied the positions built there by Heeresgruppe Süd the previous year. Heeresgruppe A in the Caucasus fell back on the shores of the Black Sea, all of its 400,000 troops now isolated from the main course of operations.

Meanwhile, on February 2, Golikov's Voronezh Front had started Operation 'Zvezda' ('Star'), the second stage of its offensive. On the right, 60th and 38th Armies would strike out for Kursk and Oboyan respectively. On the left — the main effort — three armies would aim at Kharkov: Moskalenko's 40th Army would attack in the general direction of Belgorod-Kharkov, outflanking Kharkov from the north-west; the newly created 69th Army (Lieutenant-General M. I. Kazakov) would strike directly at the city through Volchansk; and Rybalko's 3rd Tank Army would outflank Kharkov from the south-west. Coordinating the Kharkov offensive was Marshall A. M. Vasilevskii.

By now, the Russian troops were feeling the effect of the previous month's fighting: they were tired, their ranks depleted, and ammunition and supplies were running low. The Soviet armies got off to a slow start. Not until the third day, February 4, did the lead tanks of Rybalko's 3rd Tank Army reach the northern Donetz opposite Pechenegi and Chuguyev, some 20 miles due east of Kharkov. Already behind schedule, they were unable to cross. The high western bank was firmly held by the 'Leibstandarte', and initial frontal attacks across the frozen river brought only heavy losses in men and tanks as well as a waste of scarce ammunition. Further north, drawing his forces away from the main thrust, Rybalko's army got involved in heavy battles with SS-Division 'Das Reich' around Prikolotnoye and Belyi Kolodez.

However, Soviet movements on either flank produced other threats to Kharkov. To the north-east, 40th Army reached Belgorod, 55 miles from Kharkov, on the 9th, driving out the 168. Infanterie-Division and establishing a bridgehead across the Donetz; that same day 69th Army, despite skilful delaying actions by the Division 'Grossdeutschland', entered Volchansk, 40 miles from Kharkov. And away to the south-west, the 6th Guards Cavalry Corps on Rybalko's flank had swung through Andreyevka and was approaching Merefa, just ten miles distant from Kharkov.

The capture of Belgorod by 40th Army placed German forces east of the Donetz in risk of being trapped, so Lanz ordered a general retreat across the river to new defensive positions covering the close approaches to Kharkov. Due east of the city, the 'Leibstandarte' began to fall back just as 3rd Tank Army launched its final assault across the iced river. To the north-east, 'Das Reich' withdrew using the bridges at Staryi Saltov. On its left, the 'Grossdeutschland' took up blocking positions on the main road from Belgorod to Kharkov. On the far left wing, the 168. Infanterie-Division continued delaying actions, meanwhile trying to fill the growing gap with 2. Armee.

On February 9, the 69th Army resumed its pursuit of the retreating German forces. Its divisions crossed the northern Donetz and pushed to within 15 miles of Kharkov, where they bumped into 'Das Reich'. The advance continued slowly against heavy opposition until it struck the outer defensive line covering Kharkov. This Kazakov's army was unable to penetrate.

On the night of February 9/10, 3rd Tank Army finally forced the Donetz too. Its 15th Tank Corps secured crossings near Pechenegi, pushing the 'Leibstandarte' (which had just begun its planned withdrawal) out of the town. The adjacent 12th Tank Corps did the same at Chuguyev further south. The Russians soon struck against the German

Charkov Hauptbahnhof — Kharkov main railway station under German tenure.The Luftwaffe photographer asked the driver of his own Zündapp KS-600 motor cycle to pose. (ECPArmées)

Kharkov Yuznyi Vokzal — the city's main railway station as it looks today. Kharkov had its first railway line opened in 1869 and has been a major rail centre ever since.

prepared defences at Rogan, ten miles east of Kharkov. All attempts to pierce these positions on the 11th failed. Between February 12-14, Rybalko's army slowly battled forward, making meagre gains of between four and eight miles and pushing the 'Leibstandarte' from the outer to the inner Kharkov defences. By the 14th, the 15th Tank Corps, 160th Rifle and 48th Guards Rifle Divisions were fighting in the factory district in the eastern suburbs. However, the advance remained painfully slow.

With both 69th and 3rd Tank Armies stymied, the decisive penetration was made by 40th Army. On the 10th, Moskalenko's army attacked south along the Belgorod-Kharkov railway and main road with four infantry divisions and the 4th Tank Corps. With the 168. Infanterie-Division retreating south-westward and the 'Grossdeutschland' southward, the German lines thinned. On the 12th, the 4th Tank Corps (now renamed 5th Guards Tank Corps) broke through at Zolochev. All divisions pressed forward, and by nightfall on February 13 the armour, supported by the 340th Rifle Division, reached Kharkov's northern inner defence.

Armee-Abteilung Lanz struggled in vain to stem the Soviet thrusts toward the city. Early in February, Hitler had declared Kharkov a fortress, to which Lanz had objected on the grounds that the city was not fortified and that he had no troops with which to hold it. On February 6 at the FHQ, Hitler personally gave Lanz a double mission: to hold Kharkov; and to counter-attack southward with the SS-Panzerkorps in order to close the gap with von Manstein's army group.

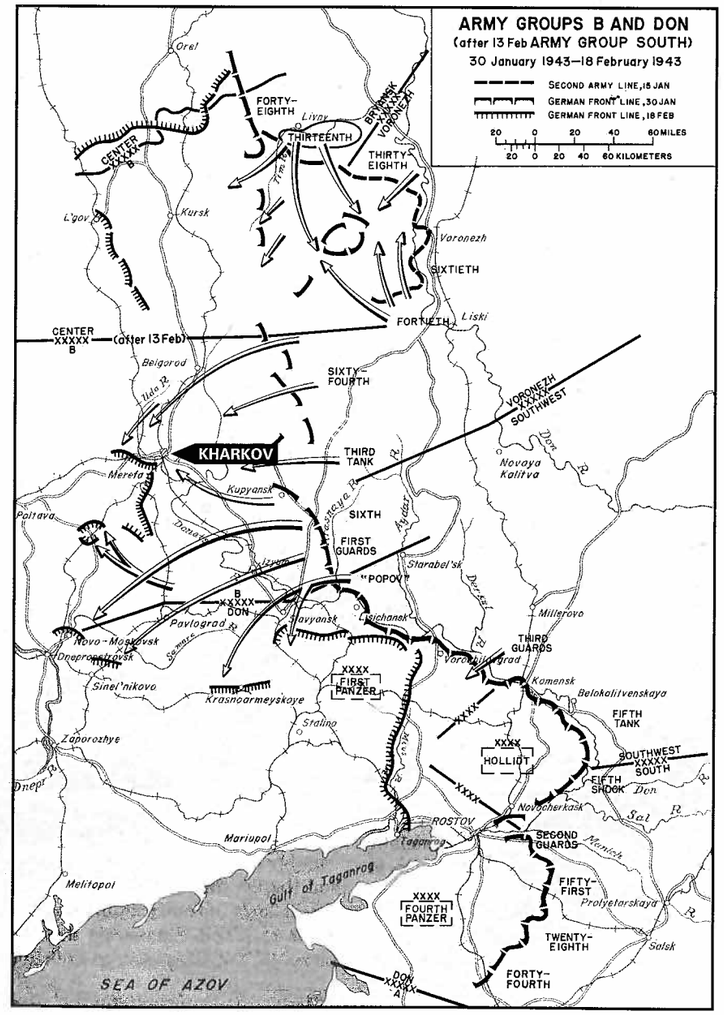
However, Hausser's SS-Panzerkorps was under so much enemy pressure east of Kharkov that it had great difficulty assembling enough strength for such a counter-attack. On the 7th, Heeresgruppe B warned that no more excuses would be accepted. On the 10th, Lanz ordered the counter-attack to commence the following day, but he told the army group commander, Weichs, that he now had only three divisions — 'Leibstandarte', 'Das Reich' and 'Grossdeutschland' — fit for combat and so could not be expected to hold off four Soviet armies, defend Kharkov, and counter-attack as well. If the latter attack were started, he warned, the risk of losing Kharkov would have to be accepted.

On February 11, jumping off from Merefa, the SS-Panzerkorps attacked south-eastward with a force made up of most of the 'Leibstandarte' units and one panzergrenadier regiment of 'Das Reich'. In three days, the force gained about 30 miles but without really managing to come to grips with the enemy. The deep snow forced the German armour to stay on the roads and the Russians, mostly cavalry with sledges, took to the woods. Nevertheless, the SS units pushed the 6th Cavalry Corps back to a perimeter position around Okhocheye where, in a series of engagements lasting until February 15, much of it was decimated.

On the morning of the 14th, Hitler ordered the front around Kharkov to be absolutely held, even if the counter-attack to the south had to be stopped temporarily. That day, February 14, Manstein's Heeresgruppe Don assumed command of Armee-Abteilung Lanz. Heeresgruppe B was taken out of the front, and Manstein's army group was renamed Heeresgruppe Süd. Kharkov was now Manstein's responsibility.

The offensive that led to the first Russian recapture of Kharkov began on January 13, 1943. Breaking away from the Don river on a broad front, the Soviet armies crossed the northern Donetz, after which they bore down on Kharkov from three sides, pushing out Armee-Abteilung Lanz.

A Tiger and a Kübelwagen of SS-Division 'Das Reich' pictured near the railway station. The SS panzergrenadier divisions of 1943 each had a company of Tigers in their panzer regiment. The 'Leibstandarte' had them in 4. Kompanie, 'Das Reich' in 8. Kompanie — hence '822'. The Tiger here is another indication that these pictures date from February 1943 for by the time 'Das Reich' re-entered Kharkov in March, it had no Tigers left, all having been either knocked out, immobilised, or taken in for repair. (ECP Armées)

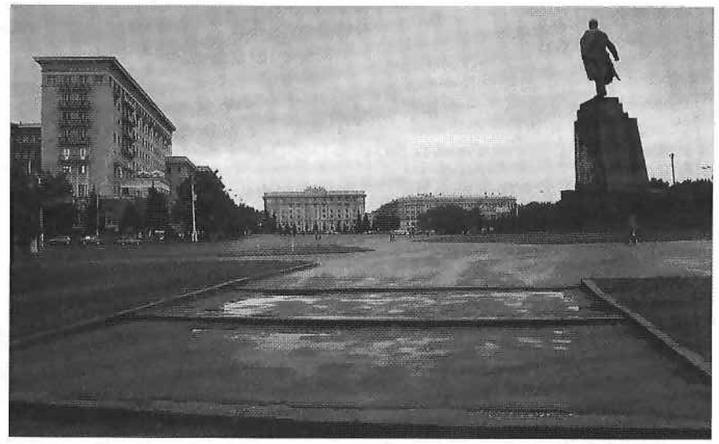


Above: **On February 16, 1943, the Red Army re-entered Kharkov. Here, T-34/76D tanks with infantry riding on the decks drive past the central block of the Gosprom complex. (Novosti)** *Below:* **A perfect comparison 58 years later.**

Looking the other way down the great snow-covered expanse of Dzerzhinsky Square. The T-34s probably belonged to the 15th Tank Corps and the infantry to the 160th Rifle Division, both units of 3rd Tank Army. (Novosti)

Meanwhile, the Russians continued their envelopment of the city. In 40th Army's sector on the 14th, the 183rd Rifle Division seized Sokolniki on the northern outskirts and, by evening, had penetrated the city proper. The 340th Rifle Division with parts of the 25th Guards Rifle Division and armour support entered the north-western suburbs. The army's main force — 5th Guards Tank Corps, the 305th Rifle Division and 6th Guards Motorised Rifle Brigade — sliced southwards west of the city, cutting the railway and main road at Lyubotin. Coupled with 3rd Tank Army's advance to Osnovo, this left the Germans with only a narrow six-mile-wide corridor into and out of the city. Cooped up inside Kharkov's perimeter were the 'Grossdeutschland' (of Korps Raus), defending the western approaches; 'Das Reich' (minus one regiment) defending the northern suburbs; one reinforced panzer-grenadier regiment of the 'Leibstandarte' defending the eastern suburbs; and the 320. Infanterie-Division holding the south-eastern sector.

In the afternoon of the 14th, Hausser, the SS-Panzerkorps commander, received reports of armed civilians firing at his troops in Kharkov. Already faced with certain encirclement and now fearing a civilian uprising, at 1620 hours he notified Armee-Abteilung Lanz that unless Lanz would issue an order to abandon the city before 1630, he — Hausser — would do so himself. At 1645, not having heard from Lanz, Hausser gave the order to evacuate the city that night. Lanz reacted immediately: at 1725 he radioed Hausser that he was to obey the Führer's order and rescind his withdrawal orders. At 1800, he verbally repeated this to Hausser on the phone. Thus twice reminded of Hitler's order, Hausser changed his mind and at 2130 reported that he was determined 'to hold Kharkov to the last man'.



The square was renamed Ploshchad Svobody (Freedom Square) after the war but when the Ukraine gained independence in 1991 it got a new name: Ploshchad Nezavisimosti (Independence Square).

Right: **Lieutenant-General P. Rybalko (second from right), commander of the 3rd Tank Army, in Kharkov. (Novosti)**

A column of T-34s rolls up Sverdlov Street to the western exit of Kharkov to continue their winter offensive. However, the armies of Voronezh Front would soon grind to a halt west of Kharkov, only to be hit full in the left flank by the swift and devastating counter-attack made by the SS-Panzerkorps the following month. (Novosti)

The propaganda painting on the wall on the right has disappeared, but otherwise this spot has seen remarkably little change.

Above: **Looking the other way, back toward the city centre. These T-34s could belong to the 5th Guards Tank Corps of the 40th Army; the 15th Tank Corps of the 3rd Tank Army; the 137th Tank Brigade or the 292nd Tank Regiment of the 69th Army; or even to the follow-up 2nd Tank Corps — all of which took part in the recapture of Kharkov in February 1943. (Novosti)** *Below:* **The junction of Sverdlov Street with Elizarov and Narimanov Streets today.**

The next morning, February 15, Hitler set holding Kharkov as Lanz's sole mission, but it was too late. At dawn, the Soviets opened their final assault on the city. In 40th Army's sector the 340th Rifle Division and 5th Guards Tank Corps penetrated into western Kharkov. Heavy snow in the dense woods on the outskirts held up the tanks, but the infantry carried on. By noon, the German corridor out of the city to the south-west had shrunk to a width of little more than a mile and a half, and elements of 'Das Reich' against orders, had pulled out of the northern suburbs. The 69th Army advanced and occupied the positions vacated by the Germans. In 3rd Tank Army's sector the 15th Tank Corps and 160th Rifle Division entered eastern Kharkov, engaging in heavy street fighting with the SS panzergrenadiers.

Not wishing to be trapped in the city, in spite of Hitler's renewed directive, and disobeying Manstein's and Lanz's direct orders to hold on, at 1300 on the 15th Hausser ordered his divisions to pull out of Kharkov and withdraw through the corridor south-west to the Uda river.

On the morning of the 16th, 40th Army's 25th Rifle Division and one motorised rifle brigade of the 5th Guards Tank Corps advanced into the city from the west and the 183rd Rifle Division came in from the north-west. Meanwhile, the 62nd Guards Rifle Division (3rd Tank Army) penetrated the south-western part of the city. At 1000 hours, the 15th Tank Corps and 160th Rifle Division (3rd Tank Army) linked up with the 183rd Rifle Division (40th Army) on Dzerzhinsky Square. At the same time, other 3rd Tank Army spearheads met the 5th Guards Tanks Corps (40th Army) on Sverdlov Street. By noon on February 16, Kharkov was back in Soviet hands.

Losing Kharkov which, like Stalingrad, had become a symbol was a blow to Hitler's prestige. Hausser's order to pull out of Kharkov, although a sound military decision, had clearly been in disobedience of a Führer's order. But Hitler was unwilling to punish or reprimand a commanding general of his favourite elite corps, the Waffen-SS. Manstein and Lanz had both shared Hausser's view that Kharkov was untenable but neither had dared to go against Hitler's order. In secret they probably approved Hausser's action, and both advised against him being relieved from command or the taking of other disciplinary action. Yet a scapegoat had to be found. On February 20, Hitler relieved Lanz and replaced him with General der Panzertruppen Werner Kempf.

Left: **The SS-Panzerkorps fighting its way back to Kharkov. Infantry and tanks of the 'Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler' fight their way through a burning village on the road to Kharkov on March 10. The tanks are from II. Bataillon of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, the PzKpfw II at the rear — '557' — belonging to its 5. Kompanie. Two SS-Kriegsberichter — Johan King and PK Cantzler — accompanied the 'Leibstandarte' during its operations in February-March 1943. This is one of King's exposures. (BA)** *Below:* **The village has previously been named as Dergatchi, north-west of Kharkov, and indeed from the sequence of photographs on King's film it can be deduced that the village in the picture must lie somewhere just north or north-west of Kharkov, probably on the Belgorod road. Although the farmsteads have changed, this is the only hamlet with a similar bend in the road.**

THE THIRD BATTLE (MARCH 1943)

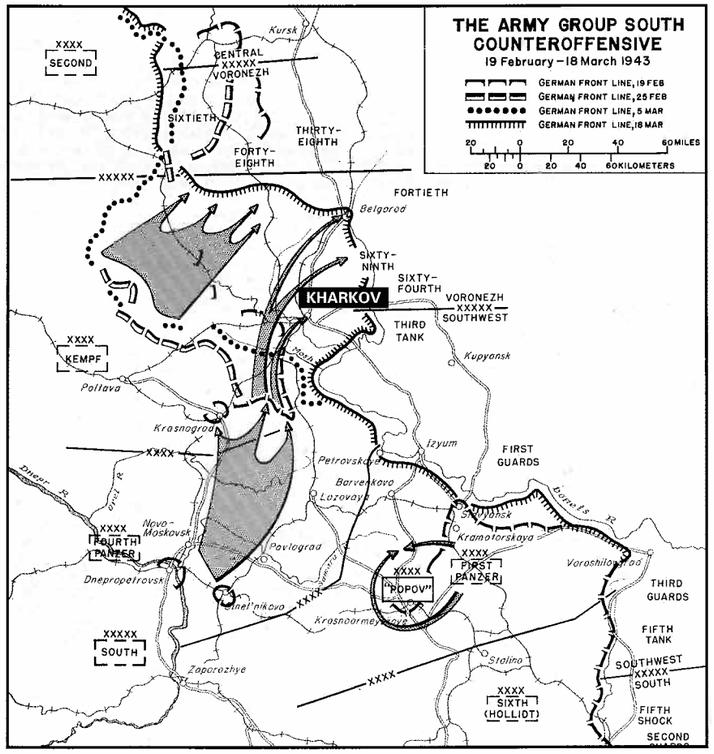
The third battle of Kharkov followed immediately on the second. After the SS-Panzerkorps extracted itself from the city, it reassembled around Krasnograd, 40 miles to the south-west. However, the Soviet offensive was still on and a giant 110-mile gap still existed between Armee-Abteilung Kempf in the north and the rest of Heeresgruppe Süd in the south. Through this gap the Soviet 6th and 1st Guards Armies and Mobile Group Popov were still streaming south-westward toward the Dnieper. Soviet intelligence estimated, and Soviet commanders believed, that the Germans would now withdraw to that river on a broad front.

On February 17, Hitler and his Wolfsschanze retinue arrived for a three-day visit to Manstein's army group HQ at Zaporozhye on the Dnieper. At a conference next day (with Soviet tanks only 36 miles to the east and no German troops in between), Manstein convinced Hitler that the first priority was not to recapture Kharkov but to close the huge gap between Armee-Abteilung Kempf and 1. Panzer-Armee.

For that mission Manstein decided to insert Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee, freshly withdrawn from the Caucasus, north of 1. Panzer-Armee. Hoth's first task would be to halt the two Russian armies heading for the Dnieper crossings at Dnepropetrovsk and throw them back across the Samara river. To carry out this assignment Hoth was given Hausser's SS-Panzerkorps with the SS-Divisions 'Das Reich' and the newly-arrived 'Totenkopf' (the 'Leibstandarte' would remain under Kempf's command) and XXXXVIII. Panzerkorps with 6. and 17 Panzer-Divisions (from Armee-Abteilung Hollidt). While Hoth stopped the Russians in front of Dnepropetrovsk, von Mackensen's 1. Panzer-Armee was to attack and eliminate Mobile Group Popov.

Hausser's SS-Panzerkorps began the counter-offensive on February 19. While the 'Leibstandarte' held a firm base around Krasnograd, 'Das Reich' started a rapid thrust due south across the snowy plains to chop off the spearheads of 6th and 1st Guards Armies. On the second day, having advanced 50 miles, the division crossed the Samara and took Novo-Moskovs, cutting into the flank of 6th Army (Lieutenant-General F. M. Kharitonov); the next day, turning east, it advanced another 25 miles and pushed into Pavlograd. By these swift blows it eliminated the threat to the Dnieper crossings and trapped a large number of Soviet units south of the Samara. In the following two days, February 22-23, the division destroyed some of them and drove the rest north across the Samara.

Manstein's offensive closed the wide gap in the front of his Heeresgruppe Süd.



Motor cycle troops of SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1, the 'Leibstandarte"s reconnaissance unit, in the same village. (BA)

Again, the bend in the road and the slope are the only indications that confirm the comparison.

Meanwhile, on the 22nd, the SS-Panzerkorps had committed the 'Totenkopf'. The division advanced on a parallel course left of 'Das Reich' but stayed north of the Samara, wheeling east on the 23rd too. By next day, both divisions had made another left turn and were advancing northward side by side, crushing the Soviet units in their path. East of Pavlograd the 6. and 17. Panzer-Divisions of XXXXVIII. Panzerkorps (General der Panzertruppen Otto von Knobelsdorff) moved in and began to push north alongside the SS-Panzerkorps, cutting the Russian supply lines.

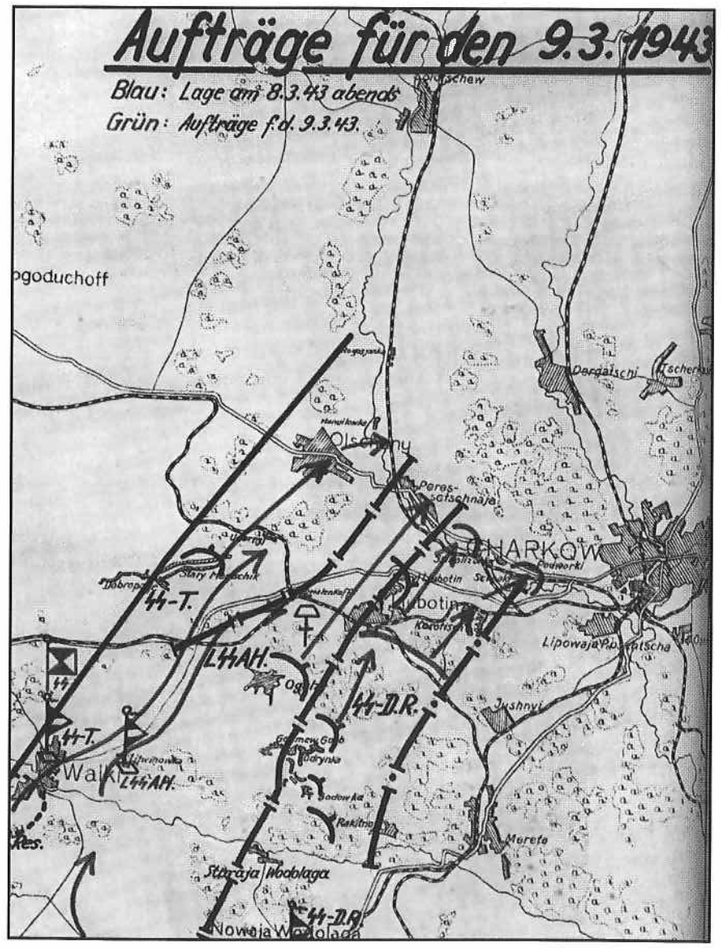
As these battles were taking place, von Mackensen of 1. Panzer-Armee further east had attacked Mobile Group Popov, launching his XL. Panzerkorps (7 and 11. Panzer-Divisions, SS-Division 'Wiking' and 333. Infanterie-Division) in a wide pincer movement around it from the east. By February 24, the pocket had been closed and many of Popov's units trapped inside decimated, although a sizable number of tanks and troops had managed to escape north to Barvenkovo.

Elated by the initial success of his counter-offensive against South-Western Front, Manstein on February 25 directed his two panzer armies to strike north in preparation of an attack into the south flank of Voronezh Front. Mackensen's 1. Panzer-Armee on the right was to capture Petrovskoye and Izyum to eliminate the Red Army's Donetz crossings, and Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee on the left was to advance north-east to Lozovaya in anticipation of a thrust north along the railway to Kharkov.

On February 26, 'Das Reich' took Lozovaya after heavy street fighting. 'Totenkopf' drew level on its left. Two days later, 17. Panzer-Division took Petrovskoye on the Donetz. All these actions left units of 1st Guards Army badly mauled. Further east, XL. Panzerkorps of 1. Panzer-Armee met other units of the 1st Guards Army and the remnants of Mobile Group Popov — with less than 100 tanks between them, most of them immobilised for lack of fuel — near Barvenkovo. Forced to make a final stand, the Russian forces were cut to pieces.

On February 28, Manstein ordered Hoth to begin the push toward Kharkov and von Mackensen to drive to the Donetz in the area east of Petrovskoye. Time was running short as daytime thaw had set in. Already the melting snow was making the roads soft and muddy, and in a few days' time they would become completely impassable.

In spite of the thaw, both armies made amazingly rapid progress. Starting on March 1, Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee covered 50 miles in five days, reaching the Mosh river, ten miles south of Kharkov, on the 5th. Over most of the distance it was opposed only by elements of the battered 1st Guards Army, but east of Krasnograd the SS-Panzerkorps — linking up with the 'Leibstandarte' on March 4 — trapped three rifle divisions (11th, 184th and 219th) and three tank brigades (52nd, 88th and 113th) of Rybalko's 3rd Tank Army, which the Stavka had ordered to counter-attack southward on the 28th. The following day, 'Totenkopf' liquidated this pocket. Next day, March 6, the 'Leibstandarte' gained a first bridgehead across the Mosh at Bridok. Further east, 1. Panzer-Armee had by then closed on the Donetz along its entire line, leaving the Russians only small bridgeheads in the sharper bends of the still-frozen river.



German situation map showing the three SS divisions coming abreast of Kharkov.

At 1215 on March 10, the point of SS-Aufklärungs-Abteilung 1 (Kampfgruppe Meyer) reached the northern entry of Kharkov, where it halted to await orders. Kriegsberichter King pictured the unit's Schwimmwagens stationary on the Belgorod main road, with the first buildings of Kharkov visible in the distance. Shortly after, instead of entering the city, the unit would receive orders to carry on a few miles further east, to the next main road into Kharkov, the one from Volchansk. From there, Meyer was to launch his assault into the city on the morrow. The Belgorod road was assigned to Kampfgruppe Witt. (NIOD)

Manstein and Hoth now had to decide whether or not to continue to Kharkov at the risk of being halted by the thaw. As it appeared that the Russians were not going to offer much resistance north of the Mosh and as the weather turned colder again on March 7, they decided to carry on. However, in order not to lose contact with Armee-Abteilung Kempf, they decided to strike west of Kharkov instead of to the east of it. Their plan was to have the SS-Panzerkorps sever the Russian communication lines through Kharkov on the west and then sweep round the city from the north, thus encircling it.

Again, the advance went astonishingly well. On March 8, Hausser's SS-Panzerkorps broke away from the Mosh river on a broad front between Walki and Merefa. Advancing in line abreast were (from west to east) 'Totenkopf', 'Leibstandarte' and 'Das Reich', with Division 'Grossdeutschland' of Armee-Abteilung Kempf moving alongside on their left. On March 9, the three SS divisions drew level with the western outskirts of Kharkov. Opposing them stood three Soviet armies: Kazakov's 69th Army north of the city, Moskalenko's 40th Army south of it, and Rybalko's 3rd Tank Army defending the city itself. Waiting inside Kharkov proper were the 1st and 2nd Guards Tank Corps and the 48th, 104th, 305th, and 307th Rifle Divisions.

Although they had orders to outflank Kharkov from the west, the SS divisions, out to avenge their humiliating defeat in February, were inexorably drawn towards the city. Manstein's and Hoth's initial orders of the 8th had been quite clear that the SS-Panzerkorps was to stay out of the city; but their subsequent orders on this point were ambiguous. At 1215 on the 9th, 4. Panzer-Armee radioed the SS-Panzerkorps: 'If at all possible, Kharkov is to be taken by a rapid stroke'. Realising this was a change from previous orders, Hausser asked for clarification. However, without waiting for a reply, at 1730 he also issued orders for a surprise assault on the city to commence next day: 'Das Reich' was to come in from the west and the 'Leibstandarte' from the north, while 'Totenkopf' was to form a protective screen to the north and north-west.

Hoth immediately ordered Hausser to stick to the original plan, warning against a frontal assault against the city which would tie down tanks and troops in costly street fighting. Hausser's corps was to continue its northern envelopment of the city. However, Hoth's order to Hausser sent at 1920 again included a passage that left room for interpretation: 'The situation inside the city is to be reconnoitred. Possibilities for taking possession of the city in a rapid stroke are to be exploited'. This was all that Hausser needed to continue his preparations for a penetration of the city.

Although Hausser had his mind set on the assault, Soviet opposition and traffic conditions forced him to delay it by one day. 'Das Reich' needed it to manoeuvre into attack positions just west of the city. The 'Leibstandarte' needed all of March 10 to fight through the town of Dergatchi north-west of Kharkov and obtain jumping-off positions along the northern edge of the city.

At 1900 that evening, an order from Manstein repeated the instruction to outflank Kharkov to the north, but again left room for interpretation by adding: 'If enemy resistance dwindles, Kharkov is to be taken'. Another order from Hoth sent at 2230 also specified that an attack on Kharkov was to come in from the east (i.e. after completion of the encirclement). Hausser choose to disregard these orders and to proceed with his own plan of attack.

At 0400 on March 11, the 'Leibstandarte' (SS-Obergruppenführer Sepp Dietrich) launched two regimental groups in four assault columns each down a different road leading into the city.

Advancing from the north-west was the 2. SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment (SS-Standartenführer Georg Wisch) which had split up in two columns, one on either side of the Belgorod-Kharkov railway that runs into the city from the north. Right of the railway, the II. Bataillon (SS-Sturmbannführer Rudolf Sandig) attacked down the road from Dergatchi and at 0530 penetrated the north-western city district of Severnyi Post. Here its right wing met heavy resistance from enemy entrenched on higher ground. Sandig's battalion fought itself forward from strong point to strong point, but by the end of the day it had only got as far as the Severnyi railway yard.

On the other side of the railway, the I. Bataillon (SS-Sturmbannführer Hugo Kraas) at 0310 stormed the northern suburb of Alexeyevka. The attack failed, a Russian counter-attack with T-34 tanks even throwing one company back out of the city. In the early afternoon, after a Stuka attack on the enemy positions and additional shelling by the four StuGs supporting the battalion, the infantry slowly battled its way back in against fierce opposition. A T-34 knocked out one of the StuGs and a concealed anti-tank gun a

March 11, and Kampfgruppe Witt has started the assault on Kharkov down the Belgorod road (see the town plan on pages 22-23). For most of the day, the advance down this axis was held up by road-blocks and fierce Russian resistance on the outskirts of the city. The armour supporting Kampfgruppe Witt — II. Bataillon of Panzer-Regiment 1 — spent long hours waiting for the road-blocks to be cleared. The commander of Panzer III '555' and Panzer II '558' scout the horizon with their binoculars, while a crew member of '559' in between takes time off to read a newspaper. Note the different styles of painting the tank numbers: whereas the light Panzer IIs have repainted theirs in red on the snow-camouflage white coating, the Panzer III has kept the white lettering on a dark background. This picture was taken by the other Kriegsberichter assigned to the 'Leibstandarte', Cantzler, at a spot just a few yards back from the previous photograph. (BA)

New apartment buildings have sprung up on the horizon, but this is the same spot on the Belgorod-Kharkov road.

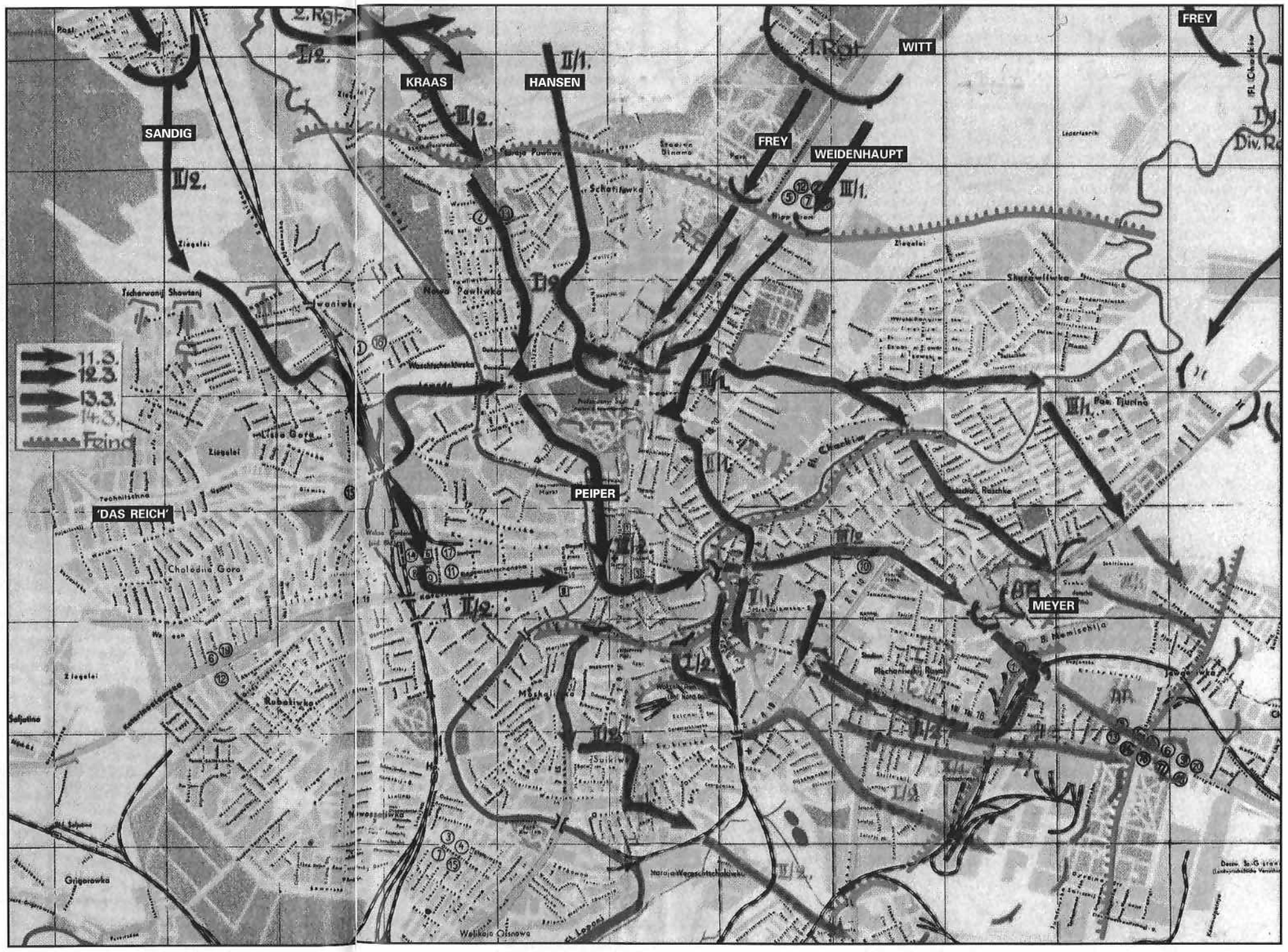
A couple of hundred yards closer to Kharkov, men of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 1 and SS-Pionier-Abteilung 1 labour to clear the obstacles blocking the road. A PaK 40 anti-tank gun stands ready to defend against a possible Russian counter-attack. Another picture by King. (NIOD)

The prominent buildings on the left have made way for new housing blocks, but the lay of the land has remained the same.

supporting 37mm flak wagon. Finally, a small group of panzergrenadiers outflanked the Russian forward positions from the west and attacked them from the rear, thus gaining a first foothold in the built-up area.

The division's main effort was from the north down the main road from Belgorod. Attacking here were SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 1 (SS-Standartenführer Fritz Witt) backed up by tanks of II. Abteilung (SS-Sturmbannführer Martin Gross) of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1. Before reaching the city limits they had to answer a Russian counter-attack across the wide open space of the Kharkov airfield on their left. Entering the city at 0750, and knocking out several T-34s, by the afternoon Kampfgruppe Witt had fought its way into the northern suburbs.

On the far left flank, coming in from the north-east down the road from Zirkuny, was Kampfgruppe Meyer, consisting of the Aufklärungs-Abteilung (the divisional reconnaissance unit) under SS-Sturmbannführer Kurt Meyer and I. Abteilung (SS-Sturmbannführer Max Wünsche) of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1 plus two SP guns of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1. Its specific task was to seize the city's eastern exit road to Rogan and Chuguyev. Shortly after moving out, the force's lead panzer was knocked out as was Meyer's command half-track. Two T-34s were accidentally knocked out by their own troops. Gaining speed, the Kampfgruppe pushed deep into Kharkov, reaching the cemetery along the main road in the city district of Imeni Kirova. Here, with the armour running low on fuel, the force entrenched in a perimeter position, defending itself against numerous attacks by Russian troops trying to force their way out to the east.



German wartime plan of Kharkov showing the advance of the various 'Leibstandarte' spearheads into the city. The division attacked from the north and north-west with its two infantry regiments divided into various kampfgruppen, each one supported by a few tanks, assault guns and self-propelled anti-tank guns, with support from artillery, Nebelwerfer mortars and Stuka dive-bombers on call. The deepest penetration on the first day was made by Kampfgruppe Meyer, the divisional Aufklärungs-Abteilung (AA on the plan), which however put it in a completely encircled and isolated position in the eastern part of the city from which it could only be relieved on the third day of the battle. We have added the names of the various Kampfgruppe commanders.

The advance into Kharkov gets under way. (BA)

Smoke from a burning vehicle darkens the daylight sky. (BA)

Meanwhile, SS-Panzergrenadier-Division 'Das Reich' attacked Kharkov from the west. This series of pictures — included in every publication on the battle of Kharkov — was one that we very much wanted to find. The visibility of the Gosprom complex on the horizon gave a clue that it was somewhere in the western or south-western outskirts of Kharkov, but we still spent hours driving up and down pot-holed streets and lanes in our hired taxi before we finally found it in Gievskaya Ulitsa (Kiev Street), a short cobble-stoned piece of road leading out of Kharkov in the Kholodnova Gora district. This location firmly dates these pictures to March 12, the second day of the assault, as the tanks are already across the anti-tank ditch at Zalyutino which held up Kampfgruppe Harmel on the first day. This Panzer IV belongs to 5. Kompanie of SS-Panzer-Regiment 2 'Das Reich'. (BA) *Below:* **Today traffic from Kiev enters Kharkov via a new road, and Gievskaya is a quiet backstreet.**

Another Panzer IV with mounted panzergrenadiers descends down the same lane. Kampfgruppe Harmel was made up of the following units of 'Das Reich': SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 'Deutschland' (minus its II. Bataillon), III. (gep.) Bataillon of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 'Der Führer', SS-Pionier-Bataillon 2, SS-Artillerie-Regiment 2 (minus one battery), SS-Flak-Abteilung 2, one battery of SS-Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung 2, and what few tanks remained of SS-Panzer-Regiment 2. To increase his tank strength, Harmel was also given 1. Kompanie of the Panzer Abteilung of the SS-Division 'Totenkopf'. Three Kriegsberichter accompanied the force — Friedrich Zschäkel, Paul Neumann, and PK Schaer — and all three took pictures in this lane. This one is by Neumann.

Meanwhile, over on the west side of Kharkov, 'Das Reich' (SS-Oberführer Herbert Ernst Vahl) had joined the attack. At 0800, its reinforced SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 'Deutschland' (SS-Obersturmbannführer Heinz Harmel) started out from Sinolisovska down the Poltava road. Meeting fierce resistance, by 1600 Kampfgruppe Harmel had reached the suburb of Zalyutino, where it was halted by a deep anti-tank ditch covered by anti-tank guns, artillery and troops entrenched in houses on the far side. A Russian counter-attack from Rychoff railway station was repulsed in bloody fighting. Further south, in a supporting attack, reinforced SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 'Der Führer' (SS-Obersturmbannführer Otto Kumm) fought its way south of the city and cut the Merefa road.

However, at 1505, an order from 4. Panzer-Armee arrived which initiated a sharp controversy between the army commander and the commander of the SS-Panzerkorps. Hoth ordered Hausser to immediately break off the attack from the west, have 'Das Reich' leave only a security screen there, and to move the division round the north to east of the city — as intended in the original plan — in order to cut the Soviet escape route to Chuguyev.

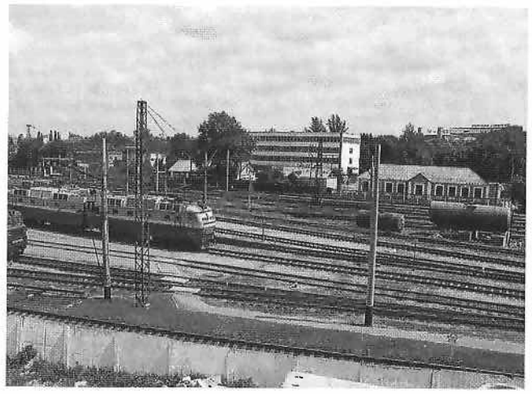
Hausser was unwilling to concur: 'Das Reich' was now fully engaged and he judged the risk of pulling out under combat conditions too great. Furthermore, he argued that, with the worsening road conditions and the large woods north of Kharkov, moving the division round the north would take more time than if the division continued in the corps effort to open a road straight through the city. At 2100 that evening he informed Hoth of his opinions, telling him that he intended to continue his assault on the city with the same two divisions; instead of moving 'Das Reich' to east of Kharkov, he would instruct 'Totenkopf' to send a force thereto.

Thus 'Das Reich' continued its attack on the city. During the night of March 11/12, a pioneer assault group of Kampfgruppe Harmel sneaked across the anti-tank ditch and broke into the houses on the other side, surprising the Red Army defenders. By 0440, all Russian anti-tank guns had been captured and a bridgehead won, enabling armour to cross the ditch. By 0525, the Kampfgruppe was rolling towards the city centre. Shortly before noon, its lead troops were approaching the Kharkov main railway station.

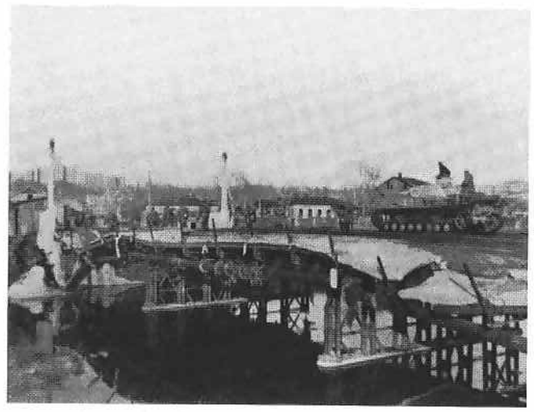
This was as far as 'Das Reich' would get. At 0115 that night Hoth had sent Hausser a repeat of his earlier order to move 'Das Reich' round to the east. Hausser's reply — not sent until 1135 — only elaborated on his earlier arguments for not carrying out the ordered move. At 1150, exasperated with his subordinate's pig-headedness, Hoth radioed Hausser a very sharp order to immediately comply with his instructions and send 'Das Reich' round the north. This time, Hausser obeyed. That evening, having made contact with the 'Leibstandarte' in north-western Kharkov, 'Das Reich' arranged to pass through that division's sector inside the city, giving it not only a short cut to the east but also better-surfaced roads for its columns.

A Panzer III of 'Das Reich' (note the divisional emblem) in the same lane, pictured by Schaer. Earlier publications have identified these images as showing the 'Leibstandarte', but this shot and our establishment of the location prove otherwise. (NIOD)

Left: **At the bottom of the slope, Kampfgruppe Harmel reached the deep cutting of the railway yard just north of Kharkov main station. Here a machine-gun team of 16. Pionier-Kompanie of**



SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 'Deutschland' has set up its MG42 on the edge of the cutting. Picture by Neumann. (BA) *Right:* **The view across the Kharkov shunting yard today.**



Left: **With their advance halted by a direct order from 4. Panzer-Armee shortly after noon on the 12th, Kampfgruppe Harmel broke off the fight. Next morning, ordered to move to north-east of Kharkov, they passed through the sector already**

cleared by the 'Leibstandarte'. PK Neumann pictured men and armour of the Kampfgruppe crossing the Lopan river via the bridge on Pistinsky Street. (BA) *Right:* **The damage to the bridge has been repaired.**

Left: **Zschäkel photographed panzergrenadiers crossing the same bridge. The Gosprom looms high on the horizon. (NIOD)**

Right: **Tram lines still cross the river via this bridge today. Unfortunately, the trees hide most of the Gosprom.**

The Russian defenders had built road barricades at nearly every intersection in Kharkov centre. This one blocked Sumy Street, the main road into town from Belgorod, and the major axis of attack for Kampfgruppe Witt. Two Soviet tanks were knocked out in the fighting which reached this point on the second day, March 12. The Russians used large numbers of T-34s in the street battle — the 'Leibstandarte' alone reported 19 knocked out on the first day. Picture by Kriegsberichter Panzner. (NIOD)

The 'Leibstandarte' meanwhile had made good progress on the 12th. At mid-morning, Kampfgruppe Sandig on the right finally broke through the field fortifications on the north-western outskirts and, advancing against snipers and trajectory fire, reached the northern end of the Kharkov main railway station yard at 1015. Just before nightfall, Sandig's battalion captured the railway station itself (where it linked up with Kampfgruppe Harmel of 'Das Reich').

Sandig's left-hand neighbour, Kampfgruppe Kraas, renewed its assault on Alexeyevka. After hammering the enemy with artillery and Nebelwerfer rockets, the panzergrenadiers penetrated the city proper in pursuit of the retreating Red Army troops. In bloody close-quarter fighting in the urban districts of Lisaya Gora and Pavlovka, several Russian battalions were ripped apart, and 155 prisoners taken. By the end of the day, the two Kampfgruppen of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2 occupied a defensive line along Katerinolavska Street.

SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 1 overcame the resistance in the northern suburbs. In company groups, each one supported by a few panzers, its I. Bataillon (SS-Sturmbann-

The barricade stood just half a mile north of where Sumy Street reaches Dzerzhinsky Square. Because of the trees we have taken our comparison from the pavement.

führer Albert Frey) and III. Bataillon (SS-Sturmbannführer Wilhelm Weidenhaupt) fought their way forward from one apartment complex to the next. As darkness fell, they had reached a line just two streets north of Dzerzhinsky Square.

Two streets further north, another barricade blocked off Chernischevski Street, a side street of Sumy.

The crossroads of Chernischevski and Sumy Streets now. Kharkov centre is to the left and Belgorod to the right.

Early on the second day, Kampfgruppe Hansen of the 'Leibstandarte' reached Pravdy Prospekt, the wide avenue circling round the rear of the Gosprom complex. From here Hansen launched the attack on Dzerzhinsky Square, sending one force

round the south (towards the camera) and another round the north. Here a Marder III 7,5cm self-propelled gun of SS-Panzerjäger-Abteilung 1 stands guard on Pravdy Prospekt (Avenue of the Truth) in the shadow of the Gosprom. (BA)

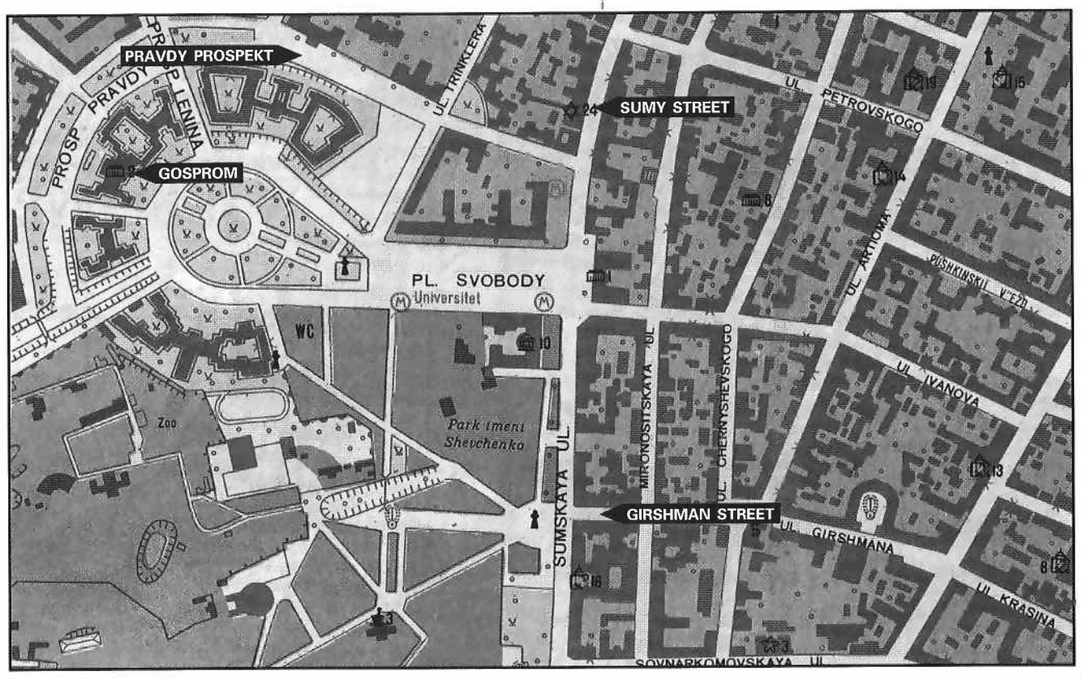
SS-Kriegsberichter King followed the northern pincer of Kampfgruppe Hansen as it attacked up Pravdy Prospekt toward Sumy Street on the morning of March 12, producing some of the best combat images of the battle for the city. Here, two Panzer IVs and one Marder stand three abreast firing away at buildings in which the Russian defenders have entrenched themselves. The time is about 1100, as can be deduced from the shadows. (BA)

Meanwhile, on the regiment's right wing, the II. Bataillon (SS-Sturmbannführer Max Hansen), with support from 7. Kompanie of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, had sneaked through the Russian lines and reached the western end of the Dzerzhinsky Square, where snipers firing from the high buildings of the Gosprom complex caused casualties. For the assault on the square itself, Hansen called forward the panzers and contacted Frey's I. Bataillon on his left. Splitting his force, Hansen sent one half round the right, through the big city park and Zoo to the Shevchenko Memorial on Sumy Street, and the other half round the left, down the broad avenue which lines the northern side of the square, also toward Sumy Street. Slowly Kampfgruppe Hansen battled its way forward, enveloping the square. By evening he had reached the eastern end, linking up with the rest of Kampfgruppe Witt on Sumy Street. The heavily-contested square, symbol of Kharkov for both sides, was renamed 'Platz der Leibstandarte'.

A sunny Sunday morning 57 years later

Panzergrenadiers of Hansen's battalion take cover in the shadow of the next building. This spectacular series of pictures — often published, but never properly identified as to where in the city it was taken — eluded finding until the very last morning of our visit to Kharkov. It was only when Karel spotted the two 'blind windows' in this shot (from the rear seat of a driving taxi) that everything fell in place. In the one hour left to us before departure to the airport we matched the whole series. (BA)

Left: **Moving forward beside a half-track, King photographed the point men crouching behind trees and bushes. PK photographers were renowned for their front-line coverage, but even among their ranks operating so close to the forward line was exceptional. This is the sharp end, where bullets are really flying. (BA)** *Right:* **No bullets, only the sound of birds singing in the small park at the intersection of Pravdy Prospekt and Trinkler Street (see the plan below).**



Having reached the cover of the building seen in the previous shot, King turned around to picture the panzers moving up. (BA)

The low building across the street has made way for a modern replacement.

Sloshing through mud and melting snow, the Kampfgruppe approaches the junction with Sumy Street. The tanks supporting Hansen's infantry were those of 7. Kompanie of SS-Panzer-Regiment 1, as can be seen from Panzer IV '704'. The commander of this company was SS-Obersturmführer Rudolf von Ribbentrop, son of Nazi foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop. (BA)

Incredibly, in the very heart of Kharkov, the old courtyard gate on the left remains exactly as in 1943.

Panzer '728' rattles forward. In the background, behind the building in the park, lies Dzerzhinsky Square. Kampfgruppe Hansen's advance enveloped the square from two sides. (NIOD)

Below: **No melting snow or debris on Pravdy Prospekt today. Our comparison was taken from closer in to give a better view of the palace under the trees.**

Left: **Retracing his steps, King bumped into SS-Sturmbannführer Max Hansen, the Kampfgruppe commander (and the commander of II. Bataillon of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 1), directing the fighting from close behind. In this shot he is talking to SS-Unterscharführer Paul Klose, one of his infantry section commanders. Hansen, wounded in the face later in the battle (his fourth wound), would be awarded the Knight's Cross for his actions at Kharkov. (BA)** *Right:* **A comparison which appeared impossible beforehand. The prize for having spotted it goes to Martin Bogaert, Karel's Belgian companion and interpreter on the Kharkov trip. This is in fact the corner of the building visible in the picture at the top of page 32.**

Left: **Members of Hansen's Kampfgruppe command group aiming their rifles at what appears to be aircraft flying overhead. The man on the right has a telescopic rifle. (BA)** *Right:* **Martin enjoys standing in for the rifleman.**

Meanwhile, at 1030, SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2 had launched its III. (gep.) Bataillon, the regiment's armoured infantry battalion under SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper. Rolling into town in its half-tracks, Peiper linked up with Hansen on Dzerzhinsky Square and then carried on south-eastward another mile and a half where he snatched an intact bridge across the Kharkov river leading into Moscow Avenue.

The division's left-wing force, Kampfgruppe Meyer, had meanwhile pushed forward and reached the all-important junction of the Volchansk and Chuguyev exit roads in the eastern part of Kharkov. The force occupied a hedgehog position around the junction, desperately fighting off fierce Russian counter-attacks all day long, out of physical contact with the rest of the division, except for a patrol of three half-tracks from Kampfgruppe Peiper which established a short contact in the afternoon.

Below left: **Red Army prisoners assembled on Dzerzhinsky Square, pictured by Kriegsberichter Ludwig. (BA)** *Below right:* **The building across the street has disappeared, but the Gosprom serves to align the comparison.**

Kampfgruppe Hansen has linked up with the rest of Kampfgruppe Witt on Sumy Street. It is now March 13, the third day of the battle. This can be deduced from the fact that this picture was taken by SS-Kriegsberichter Neumann, who reached this point with Kampfgruppe Harmel of 'Das Reich' as it traversed the city on its way out to the north-east on the morning of the 13th. Panzer '731' and another panzer of 7. Kompanie wait to resume the advance through the maze of streets that lie east of Dzerzhinsky Square with Kampfgruppe Witt's III. Bataillon. (BA)

Looking north on Sumy Street, at the intersection with Girshman Street (see the plan on page 32).

Next day, March 13, the battle continued. From its position around Dzerzhinsky Square, Kampfgruppe Witt pushed toward the line of the Kharkov river, Weidenhaupt's III. Bataillon going due east, and Hansen's II. Bataillon fighting south toward Peiper's bridgehead. The going was slow. Everywhere, the Russians resisted fiercely with machine guns and anti-tank guns, and each block of buildings had to be cleaned out separately. Russian tanks lured in side streets and courtyards. Russian artillery held the bridges across the Kharkov under constant shelling.

Meanwhile, Frey's I. Bataillon of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 1 had moved out from the area of Kharkov aerodrome, crossed the Kharkov river just north of the city, and begun to push back into the city down the Volchansk road in an attempt to trap the Red Army units fighting in the city centre.

In the southern half of town, in the sector of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2, the struggle was equally bitter. By 1230, Peiper's III. Bataillon had enlarged its bridgehead sufficiently for a break-out along Moscow Avenue. Half an hour later, his armoured infantry column linked up with Kampfgruppe Meyer at the Volchansk/Chuguyev road junction, relieving this force from its precarious situation. At 1530, Kraas' I. Bataillon, using Peiper's bridgehead, attacked southward across Michailovsk Street. On its right, Sandig's II. Bataillon was fighting to gain its own crossing at Torgovchi Street.

By now, the main force of 'Das Reich' had vacated the city. At 0745 that morning, having arranged a route through the 'Leibstandarte"s sector, Kampfgruppe Harmel began moving via Dzerzhinsky Square and the city districts of Litvinovska and Danilovka to a position north-east of Kharkov. By late afternoon it was engaged in fighting outside the city, attacking southward alongside Kampfgruppe Baum of SS-Division 'Totenkopf' toward the Kharkov-Chuguyev road. The only 'Das Reich' unit now remaining inside Kharkov was II. Bataillon (SS-Sturmbannführer Bissinger) of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 'Deutschland', which had the task of clearing the south-western part of the city. The few Russian troops remaining in this isolated corner offered little resistance and were quickly mopped up. By the evening of March 13, two-thirds of Kharkov was in German hands.

Left: **Almost at the same spot but looking the other way. Activity in the city park across the street causes a Panzer IV to aim its gun in that direction while a panzergrenadier watches through his binoculars. (BA)** *Right:* **The neo-classical building across the street, hidden by the trees in this comparison, is the Lysenko Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre.**

Standartenführer Fritz Witt, the commander of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 1, passes the Girshman Street intersection under cover of an SdKfz 251. Picture by Zschäkel who, like Neumann, reached this point with Kampfgruppe Harmel. (BA)

Meeting of smiling commanders in the heart of Kharkov. Witt (in riding breaches) with SS-Sturmbannführer Jochen Peiper (left), commander of the III. (gep.) Bataillon of SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2, and SS-Sturmbannführer Heinz von Westernhagen (behind), commander of the 'Leibstandarte"s Sturmgeschütz-Abteilung. (BA)

Two SdKfz 251 Schützenpanzerwagen (SPW, armoured personnel carriers) stand nearby. *Emil*, with the tubular radio antennae frame, is Peiper's Befehlswagen (command vehicle). An SS panzergrenadier division had only one of its six infantry battalions mounted in half-tracks, the rest being lorry-borne or moving on foot. This was used as a fast mobile striking unit. On February 13-14, during the second battle for Kharkov, Peiper's battalion had carried out a daring rescue operation into the sector of the 320. Infanterie-Division, bringing out 1,500 wounded men. As for this picture, it appears that all the photographers covering the battle congregated on Sumy Street that morning, for it was taken by yet another SS-Kriegsberichter, Willi Merz. (BA)

Above: **A cine cameraman films Panzers '713' and '731' of von Ribbentrop's 7. Kompanie as they venture into Girshman Street. Note the dead Russian in the doorway across the street. A glimpse of the ferocity of the fighting in Kharkov emerges from letters written by Sturmbannführer von Westernhagen, commander of the StuG-Abteilung, to his family back in Germany: 'Nobody will forget the street-fighting in Kharkov. We drove to within 30 metres of fortified houses and fired into them with assault guns. The comrades then worked us over from the upper floors with explosive charges, and when the brick dust and smoke from the explosions lifted the scoundrels fired at us again. From 100-metre range we fired artillery into them and at places we beat the brothers to death with Cossack sabres.' (BA)** *Below:* **Martin Bogaert stands in for the cameraman.**

After taking the previous shot, and with his own 'Das Reich' column having moved on, Zschäkel climbed aboard a panzer and joined a 'Leibstandarte' column that had orders to proceed south down Sumy Street to `Peiper's Bridge' on Moscow Avenue to reinforce the infantry fighting there. Visible in this picture are a Panzer IV, a Marder, and several SPW half-tracks. (NIOD)

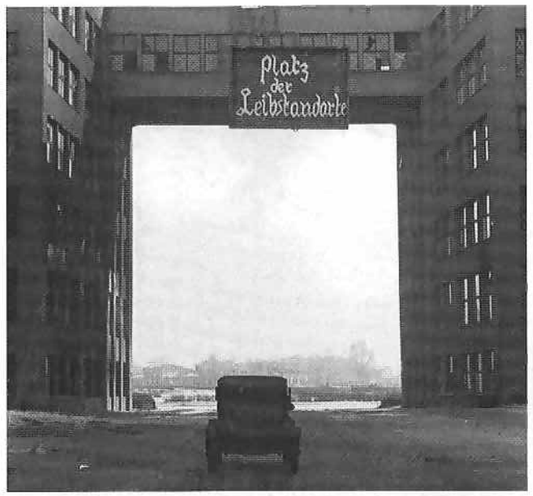
With 'Totenkopf' and most of 'Das Reich' now fighting north-east of Kharkov, the task of capturing the remainder of the city fell solely on the 'Leibstandarte'. On March 14, the division pushed east on a broad front, with Witt's SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 1 clearing the area north of the Chuguyev road, Wisch's SS-Panzergrenadier-Regiment 2 the area south of the road and Meyer's Aufklärungs-Abteilung pushing down the road itself. Throughout the day furious street fighting and house-to-house combat raged, but by late afternoon the last residential areas had been cleared. On the eastern edge of the city, Peiper's battalion now stood just west of the Kharkov agricultural experimental establishment, and Meyer's reconnaissance unit was approaching the Kharkov tractor works. All of Kharkov city was now in German hands.

That afternoon, in a special bulletin, the German radio broadcast the news that 'Waffen-SS units, with powerful Luftwaffe support, after days of bitter struggle and in a pincer attack from north and east had reconquered Kharkov'.

However, the battle was not quite over. On March 15, the 'Leibstandarte' cleared the last enemy pockets in the factory district to the south-east. That same day, Kampfgruppe Kumm of 'Das Reich' assaulted the Kharkov tractor works from the south — the huge factory complex would not be finally cleared until the following morning. A few miles further east, Kampfgruppe Harmel awaited the link-up with units of XXXXVIII. Panzerkorps which were sweeping round Kharkov from the south. And SS-Division 'Totenkopf' took Chuguyev, finally closing the ring around Kharkov and cutting 3rd Tank Army's escape route across the Donetz.

However, a considerable number of Russian forces had by then managed to escape encirclement at Kharkov. In the lightning campaign south of Kharkov Hausser's SS-Panzerkorps had stopped the Soviet offensive spearheads and destroyed two and a half Soviet armies — a miracle achievement indeed — but his subsequent frontal attack on Kharkov itself had merely pushed the Red Army units back, allowing them a withdrawal out of the city eastward. The Russians fought tenaciously to keep the escape route open, repeatedly counter-attacking 'Das Reich' and 'Totenkopf' with tanks. The latter two divisions — immobilised for much of the 14th for lack of fuel — had been slow in closing the trap east of the city.

While Karel was taking this comparison, a police car stopped right behind him. The policemen inside were however so taken aback by this unusual sight of a foreigner taking pictures in the middle of the road that they fell silent and drove on perplexed.

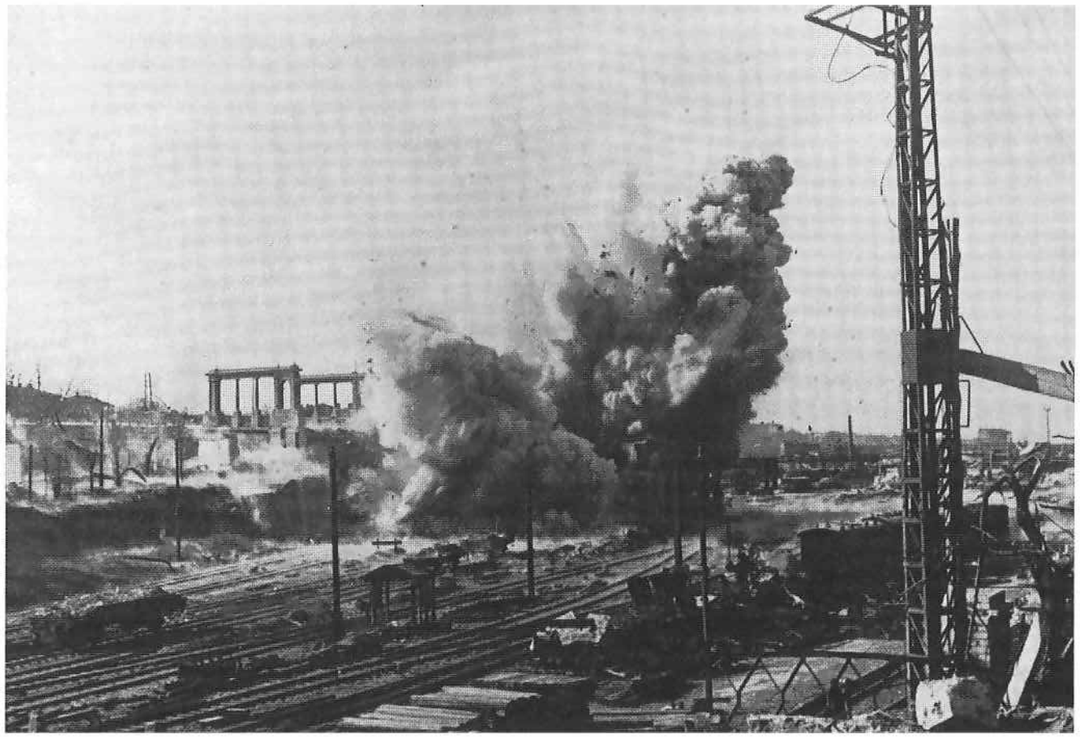


Left: **With Kharkov again in German hands, the Germans renamed Dzerzhinsky Square. Previously they had colloquially referred to it as the 'Roter Platz' after Moscow's Red Square, but now they baptised it 'Platz der Leibstandarte' in honour of the division that had borne the brunt of the fighting. Division photographer King pictured the huge sign hung above the Gosprom entrance to the square. (NIOD)** ***Right:*** **Careful comparison shows that this is the northern one of the two identical passage-ways.** *Below left:* **Signs were put up at every entrance to the square, like here on Sumy Street. (NIOD)**

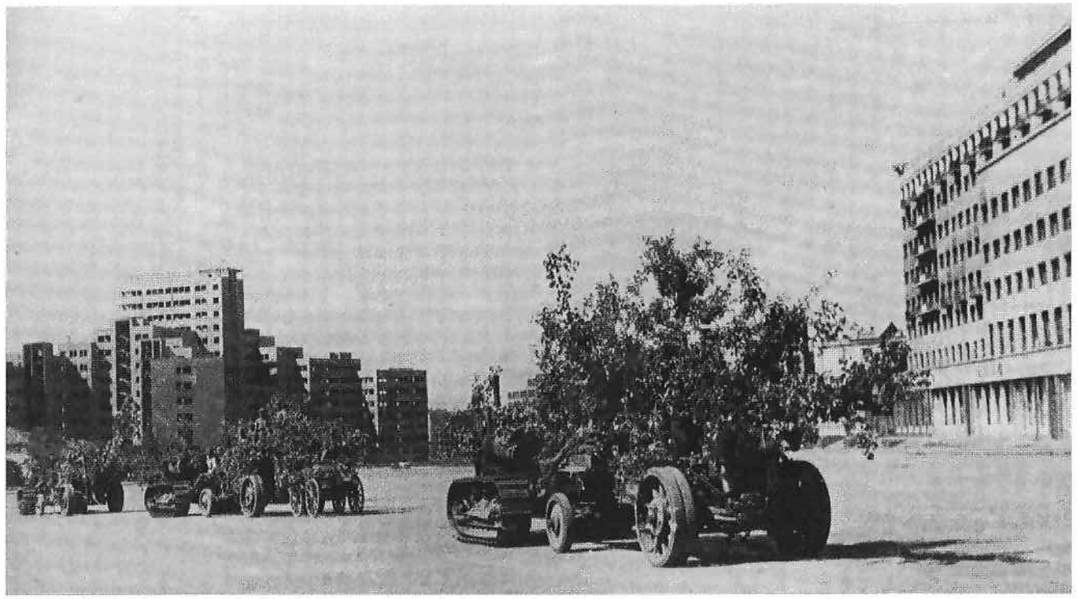
After Kharkov fell, the resistance west of the Donetz collapsed. On the morning of March 18, the SS-Panzerkorps attacked along the railway running north out of Kharkov, covered the 30 miles to Belgorod and wrestled the city from Kazakov's 69th Army in four hours. Voronezh Front withdrew behind hastily-built defences on the east bank. The Soviet winter offensive was over. Manstein's brilliant counter-offensive had closed the 110-mile gap in the front, mauled the Russian armies and regained the Donetz-Mius river line. Kharkov was again in German hands.

The recapture of Kharkov was celebrated by the Germans as a major victory. The battle fought by the SS-Panzerkorps received huge publicity in the German press and newsreels. A spate of decorations was handed out to the men of the SS divisions. However, few failed to note that Hausser, the corps commander, was left out — Hitler had not forgotten his act of disobedience during the earlier battle for the city.

Lying six miles east of Kharkov proper, along the road to Chuguyev near Losovo, the Kharkov tractor works was not cleared by Kampfgruppen Kumm and Meyer until March 16. Even though the Russians had evacuated most of the factory's equipment to behind the Ural in 1941, it was still used as a tank repair workshop by both sides. The Germans found numerous abandoned T-34s when they recaptured the site. (BA)



Above: **Although heavily damaged by the fighting in February-March, Kharkov remained a major road and rail centre for supplying the Wehrmacht, and the Germans quickly began repairing damage to its infrastructure. Here, pioneers use detonations to clear away the debris of the railway overpass on Sverdlov Street — the one used by the 57. Infanterie-Division in 1941 (see page 5). Picture by Kriegsberichter Vorpahl in April 1943. (NIOD)** *Below:* **Same railway yard, new bridges.**



The second German tenure of Kharkov was only short-lived. Five months after the Germans recaptured it, the Russians threw them out again, this time for real. Here a column of ChTZ-S-65 Stalinets artillery tractors enters Dzerzhinsky Square. (Novosti)

THE FOURTH BATTLE (AUGUST 1943)

The final battle for Kharkov was fought as part of the enormous Soviet offensive that started on August 3, 1943 — the first summer offensive launched by the Red Army in the war, which followed on the heels of the great tank battle at Kursk to the north of it.

The new offensive, Operation 'Polkodovets Rumyantsev' ('Colonel Rumyantsev'), decided on by Stalin on June 22 and coordinated by Marshal Georgi K. Zhukov, hit the north flank of Heeresgruppe Süd and aimed at recapturing Kharkov and breaking through to the Dnieper river, 170 miles to the southwest. Against Hoth's 4. Panzer-Armee and Armee-Abteilung Kempf, the Stavka had clustered Vatutin's Voronezh Front and Marshal Ivan S. Koniev's Steppe Front. The latter, previously in strategic reserve, had taken over Vatutin's left flank east and south of Belgorod, assuming command of the two armies there and bringing with it three others from the reserve. The plan was to launch four armies of Voronezh Front — with 5th Guards Tank and 1st Tank Armies breaking out on very narrow fronts through the lines held by 5th and 6th Guards Armies respectively — south-west between Akhtyrka and Kharkov toward Poltava. This flying wedge was to split apart 4. Panzer-Armee and Armee-Abteilung Kempf, pushing the former away to the north, and advance to outflank Kharkov from the west. This would enable Steppe Front — with 7th Guards and 69th Armies and the fresh 53rd, 47th and 4th Guards Armies — to drive straight on Kharkov from the north. Further south, South-Western Front (now under Malinovskii) was at that point to launch its 57th Army to Kharkov to outflank the city from the south.

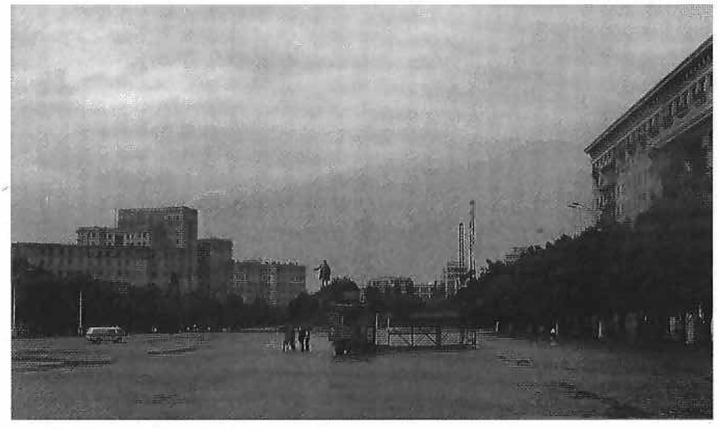
By now, the Russians had built up an overwhelming superiority in numbers. Against the two German armies, which had a strength of 15 divisions (three of them armoured), their three fronts brought 11 armies to bear. The attacking force numbered 717,000 men opposed by only 200,000 in Heeresgruppe Süd. In tanks, the Russians had 2,310 whereas the Germans had only about 150 still operational. The Russians had 12,000 artillery pieces, the Germans only 3,000. Only in the air were the odds more even: 1,275 Soviet aircraft of the 2nd and 5th Air Armies against 900 of Luftflotte 4.

Although Steppe Front, when it became operational on July 18, had no rear organisation at all, by August 3 the Russians had built up enough ammunition for 12 to 15 days of continuous operations, fuel supplies for 10 to 12 days, and food supplies for a week. During the night of August 2/3 Voronezh and Steppe Front assault formations moved up to their start lines.

Although the Germans had expected a major attack on Kharkov, the Russian assault still achieved tactical surprise. Northwest of Belgorod, on the right flank of 4. Panzer-Armee and tying in with Armee-Abteilung Kempf, stood the 167. Infanterie-Division. On the morning of August 3, the massed artillery of two armies — 5th Guards Army (Lieutenant-General A. S. Zhadov) and 5th Guards Tank Army (Lieutenant-General P. A. Rotmistrov) — with up to 230 guns to the kilometre, laid down a 1,500-metres-deep barrage lasting several hours on this one-division sector. When the fire lifted at 0800, the Soviet infantry and tanks moved forward into the attack. By 1100 hours, the assault units were through the main German positions and Zhukov unleashed the armour: 200 tanks of the 18th and 29th Tank Corps roared into the German line, followed by waves of closely packed infantry. Before nightfall, the 167. Division had been ripped apart, its infantry regiments were shattered, its survivors dazed and shaken.

A similar attack by 6th Guards Army (Lieutenant-General I. M. Chistyakov) and 1st Tank Army (Lieutenant-General M. E. Katukov) hit the 332. Infanterie-Division in the centre sector of the 4. Panzer-Armee. Here too, after a massive barrage, the assault units smashed through the German lines and at 1100 the tanks of 6th and 31st Tank Corps began to roll. By the end of the day the 332. Infanterie-Division had crumbled too.

On the Steppe Front, despite an equally devastating barrage, 53rd Army (Lieutenant-General I. M. Managarov) and 48th Corps of 69th Army met stronger opposition, but they still made penetrations nine miles deep.



A sunny square in August 1943, but we had rain in June 2000.

Next day, April 4, the armoured spearheads of 5th Guards Tank Army drove south, pushing aside the smashed 167. Division and the 6. Panzer-Division which had moved up in a futile attempt to close the breach. During the day, the tanks opened a seven-mile gap between 4. Panzer-Armee and Armee-Abteilung Kempf.

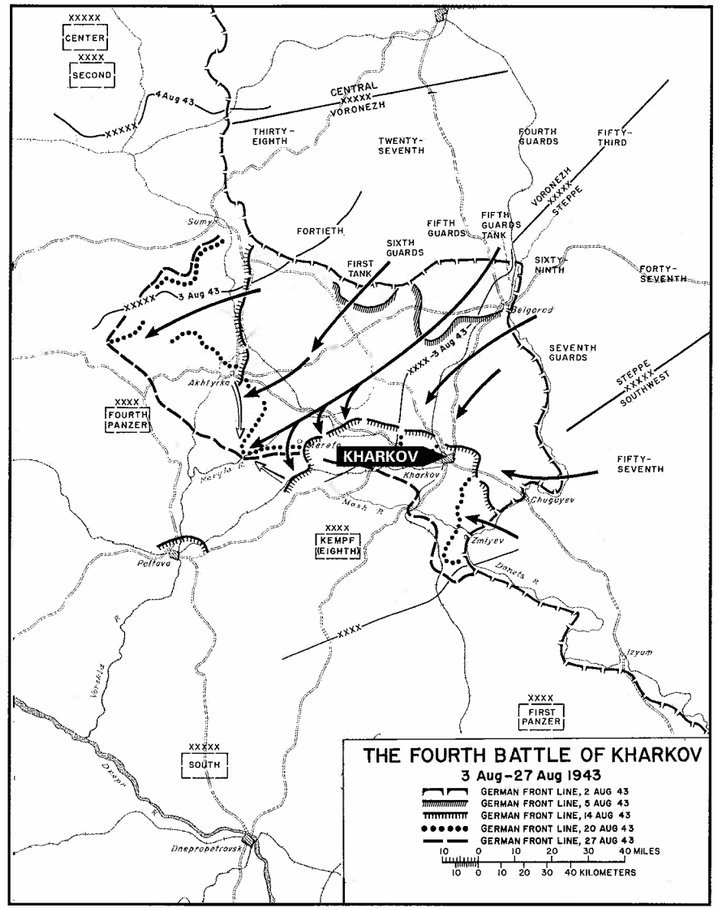
On the 5th, Steppe Front captured the key city of Belgorod. While 69th Army (now commanded by Lieutenant-General V. D. Kryuchenkin) closed in from the north, 7th Guards Army (Lieutenant-General M. S. Shumilov) crossed the Donetz to the south of the city, while 1st Mechanised Corps raced west past the city to cut the road and railway to Kharkov. The German garrison fought until pushed out, 3,000 of them being killed.

To counter the new offensive, Hitler on the 3rd ordered the Division 'Grossdeutschland' back from Heeresgruppe Mitte and released the 7. Panzer-Division from OKH reserve. Next day, he also decided to leave the SS-Divisions 'Das Reich' and 'Totenkopf' in the zone of Heeresgruppe Süd (SS-Panzerkorps HQ and the 'Leibstandarte' had already left for Italy), grouping it with the 3. Panzer-Division under III. Panzerkorps (General der Panzertruppen Hermann Breith). This and the SS-Division 'Wiking' he ordered into the sector of Armee-Abteilung Kempf. Between August 3-8, Heeresgruppe A (to the south) sent one and Heeresgruppe Mitte (to the north) three infantry divisions to help Manstein, but after that the commanders of both army groups insisted that they could not release any more divisions without impairing their own defences.

Voronezh Front had now committed Moskalenko's 40th Army and 27th Army (Lieutenant-General S. G. Trofimenko) on its northern wing to enlarge the breach. Penetrating deeply on a 15-mile front, they threatened to trap the 57., 255. and 332. Infanterie-Divisions and the 19. Panzer-Division of von Knobelsdorff's XXXXVIII. Panzerkorps. On August 7, the Germans undertook to fight their way out to the west down the one road still open to them. They tried to fool the Soviets into thinking that they were a Red Army column by having their own aircraft perform fake strafings, but the Russians soon saw through the ruse and ambushed the column, hammering it with artillery and air attacks. Fifty tanks were destroyed and Generalleutnant August Schmidt, commander of the 19. Panzer-Division, killed. The 13th Guards Rifle Division rushed forward to intercept the German units at Golovchino, while the 6th Guards Army did the same at Borisovka. Few Germans escaped the trap.

Heeresgruppe Süd could do little to stem the Soviet flood. While the encircled divisions of 4. Panzer-Armee tried to escape destruction, Hoth moved the 'Grossdeutschland' Division into a bridgehead east of Akhtyrka to anchor his right flank. However, by August 8 the gap in the German front had widened to 35 miles, giving the Russians a clear road to the Dnieper, now 100 miles to the south-west.

To the south of the gap, Kempf struggled to avoid being encircled as Steppe Front bore down on Kharkov from the north and, well to the west, 1st and 5th Guards Tank Armies of Voronezh Front wheeled to push southward past the city. Caught up in defence of Kharkov were the 106., 168., 198. and 320. Infanterie-Divisions of XI. Armeekorps (General der Panzertruppen Erhard Raus) now reinforced by the 3. Panzer-Division and what remained of the 167. Infanterie-Division and 6. Panzer-Division which had been isolated from 4. Panzer-Armee. The three SS divisions coming up from the south — in order of arrival: 'Totenkopf', 'Das Reich' and 'Wiking' — had to be committed as they arrived to protect Kempf's left rear to the west of Kharkov,



In August 1943, the Russians launched Operation 'Colonel Rumyantsev' which led to their second and final liberation of Kharkov.

upsetting Manstein's plan to use them in a combined counter-attack. All they could achieve was to establish a line parallel to the Merlya river on either side of Merefa, which did little to narrow the gap, but at least deflected the spearheads of 1st Tank Army and 6th Guards Army south-westward, away from Kharkov.

Meanwhile, on August 10, South-Western Front had joined the offensive. By next evening, its 57th Army (Lieutenant-General N. A. Gagen) had crossed the Donetz and taken Chuguyev, 20 miles east of Kharkov.

On August 12, Kempf asked for permission to pull out of Kharkov the next day and withdraw to a shorter line in the south. Manstein agreed but Hitler, like he had done in the earlier battle in February, promptly intervened with an order that the city be held under all circumstances and demanded 'the most severe measures' against any units that failed to carry out their assigned tasks. Kempf predicted that the hold-on order would produce 'another Stalingrad'. On the 14th, Manstein relieved him of his command, replacing him with General der Infanterie Otto Woehler. Two days later, the Armee-Abteilung was renamed the 8. Armee.

By the second week of August, the way to the Dnieper remained open, but Vatutin hesitated to push through while the Germans flanking the gap held firm. Instead, he turned his left flank — the 5th Guards and 5th Guards Tank Armies — against the dangling left flank of 8. Armee, where the SS divisions struggled to keep the front angled away from Kharkov. Sixty miles further east, on the weaker right flank of 8. Armee, the 57th Army widened its bridgehead across the Donetz around Chuguyev, but the tough and skilful German resistance made Koniev hesitate with his outflanking attack on Kharkov.

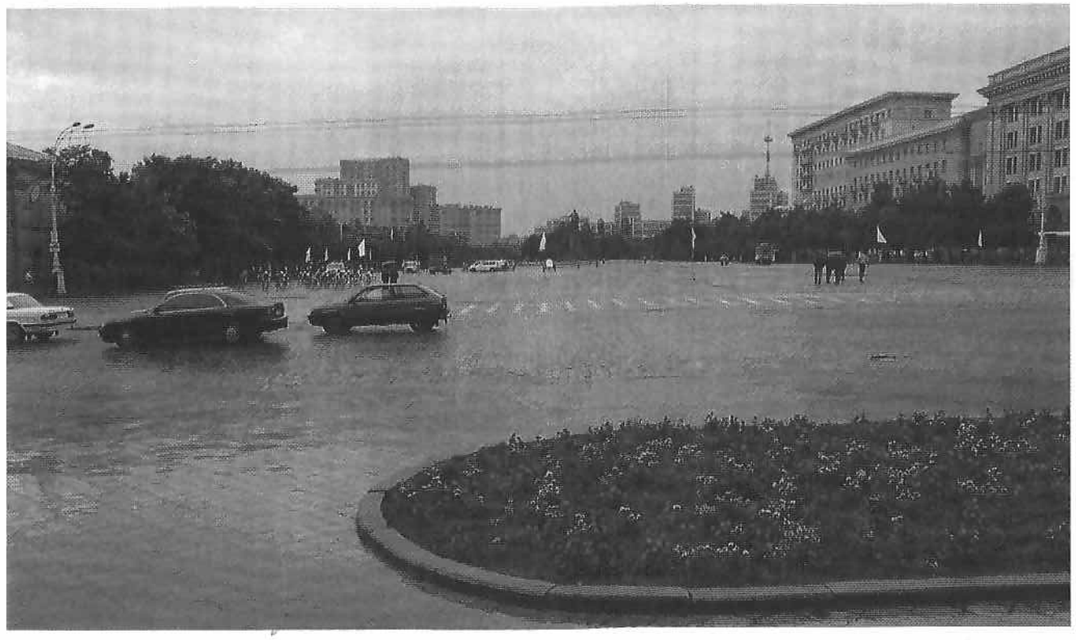
With the SS divisions tied down in the defence of Kharkov, Manstein transferred the task of closing the breach between 4. Panzer-Armee and 8. Armee to the former. On August 18, the 'Grossdeutschland' and the 7. Panzer-Division attacked from the Akhtyrka bridgehead, and in two days swept south across the gap and linked up with the SS-Division 'Totenkopf', thus re-establishing a continuous front and lifting the immediate threat to Poltava. To spoil the German counter-move, Vatutin on the 18th attacked the German flank both north and south of Akhtyrka, succeeding to again punch a hole in the German front in the north.

Meanwhile, Koniev renewed his drive on Kharkov. He had designed a new plan. His main attack would be made by Managarov's 53rd Army, still with the aim to outflank Kharkov from the north-west. To surprise the Germans, instead of the usual pre-dawn barrage ending with Katyusha strikes followed by infantry assaults, he now planned a late-afternoon attack, with Katyusha rocket strikes at unit command posts preceding the massed gun fire. Meanwhile, Kryuchenkin's

Above: **An anti-aircraft battery protects the great square while troops and trucks line up in the background. Note the Lend-Lease Jeeps in the foreground. (Novosti)** *Below:* **Independence Square is a favourite meeting spot for the Kharkovites. A cycle race was in progress on the square when we took our comparisons.**

69th Army and Shumilov's 7th Guards Army would continue to go straight for the city from the north and north-east; and Gagen's 57th Army would continue its efforts to outflank the city from the south-east.

The 53rd Army's attack started at 1645 on August 18 and hit the junction of 3. Panzer-Division and 168. Infanterie-Division. Assault battalions of the 299th, 84th and 116th Rifle Divisions broke through the German lines and plunged into the dense forests north-west of Kharkov, where they were covered from German observation and protected against attacks from the air. By August 20, Managarov's forces had gained bridgeheads across the Uda river west of Kharkov, and his 116th and 107th Rifle and 89th Guards Rifle Divisions prepared to attack the western approaches to the city. Meanwhile, divisions of the 69th and 7th Guards Armies were closing in on the German positions in the northern and eastern outskirts.



A close-up of one of the anti-aircraft guns. (Novosti)

No bombs, just a steady drizzle falling from the sky.

That day, August 20, General Woehler of 8. Armee in his turn asked permission to evacuate Kharkov that night. Like Kempf before him, he saw no chance of holding the city. The XI. Armeekorps now had only 4,000 men left, one man for every ten yards of the line. The artillery, which until now had managed to solve crisis situations, was running out of ammunition. German supply dumps in Kharkov had five trainloads of spare tank tracks, but very little else to give out. Stocks of ammunition were so low that artillery and tanks were rationed to only half their average daily requirements.

Grudgingly, Hitler gave Manstein permission to give up Kharkov, but he still asked that the city be held if at all possible. He claimed the loss would damage German prestige, especially in Turkey. In the spring, the Turkish commander-in-chief had inspected the 'impregnable' defences of the city as a guest of Armee-Abteilung Kempf. Still seeing a chance to hold Kharkov, Manstein on the 20th directed 'Das Reich' shifted east to support the XI. Armeekorps.

That same day, August 20, after repeated requests, Koniev was given command of Rotmistrov's 5th Guards Tank Army (from Voronezh Front). Ordering it to move south-east, closer to Kharkov, he planned to use it to strike south across the Uda and cut the Kharkov-Poltava road and railway which constituted the German lifeline into Kharkov. The attack, launched on the 21st, immediately bogged down in the muddy river banks and German minefields. The exhausted infantry of 53rd Army had to secure a proper bridging site first, which they did at Gavrilovka, five miles west of Kharkov, on the 22nd. However, the counter-attack by 'Das Reich', launched from south of the Kharkov-Poltava road early that day, spoiled the Soviet plan and prevented the 5th Guards Tank Army, now down to 111 tanks, from achieving a breakout. While the remnants of the 3. Panzer-Division and 168. and 198. Infanterie-Divisions clung desperately to their defences along the road and rail line, 'Das Reich' fought a series of ferocious see-saw battles with Rotmistrov's tanks and mechanised infantry for possession of the towns of Lyubotin and Korotich just south of the road, which persisted into the evening with both sides progressively exhausting their strength. Yet the German lines held.

Faced with the seemingly inevitable encirclement of Kharkov, Manstein on the 21st had given Woehler permission to withdraw 'if necessary'. Although the counter-attack by 'Das Reich' on the 22nd relieved the pressure a little, Woehler notified Manstein that he intended to abandon the city anyway. The artillery situation was now so bad that the gunners, after firing their last rounds, left their pieces and fought on as infantry. In the afternoon, Hitler requested that, should the counter-attack by 'Das Reich' improve the situation 'somewhat', Kharkov be held. Both Woehler and Manstein were now convinced that this was no longer possible. They gave the order for retreat.

During the afternoon of the 22nd, Soviet reconnaissance aircraft spotted German columns pulling out of Kharkov to the south-west. In the early evening, reconnaissance troops sighted larger withdrawals, with fires raging in the city and dumps being blown up. At 1800, realising Rotmistrov's tanks would not succeed in trapping the German garrison, Koniev ordered his armies to commence a general assault on the city.

During the night, while guns and mortars of the 5th Guards Tank and 53rd Armies, and Soviet fighter-bombers attacked the escaping German columns on the road, the Steppe Front armies stormed Kharkov. The 89th Guards and 107th Rifle Divisions (53rd Army) entered the western part of the city. The 183rd Rifle Division (69th Army) advanced south on Sumy Street. By dawn on August 23, the 89th Guards and 183rd Divisions had reached Dzerzhinsky Square, the 89th hoisting its red banner over the Gosprom building. However, the Russians bagged few of the enemy. The German units had completed their withdrawal from the city at 1100, occupying defensive positions south of the Uda river. At noon, the Russians declared the city clear of German troops. Kharkov had changed hands for the fourth and final time in the war.

The huge victory memorial along 23rd August Street in northern Kharkov.

The Kharkov Historical Museum houses a large permanent exhibition on the war which includes weapons, uniforms and numerous battlefield relics.

One of the strongest fortifications defending the Soviet naval base of Sevastopol on the Crimea during the seven-month German siege of the city was Battery No. 30, known to the Germans as Maxim Gorkii I. Its powerful 305mm guns battered by super-heavy artillery and aerial bombardment, it was finally captured in a frontal assault in June 1942. Rebuilt and modernised after the war, the battery is still an active military installation of the Russian army today.

BATTERY MAXIM GORKII I

By Svein Wiiger Olsen

The natural harbour of Sevastopol on the Crimea has been the major operational base of the Russian and Soviet Black Sea Fleet since 1804. Due to its importance, the area was heavily fortified and during the Crimean War of 1854-56 Sevastopol was under siege by the Allied armies for 349 days. In the period between the end of that war and the outbreak of the First World War, the Russians repaired and improved the defences. Among those taken under construction were two heavy coast batteries known as Battery Nos. 25 and 26, each to be armed with four 305mm/52 guns. The construction of the two 305mm batteries began in 1912 but was interrupted by the 1914-18 war and not completed until 1933-34. By then the designation of the batteries had been changed, Battery Nos. 25 and 26 becoming Battery Nos. 35 and 30 respectively. The former lay on the Khersones peninsula some ten kilometres south-west of the city, the latter some five kilometres north of Sevastopol near the Belbek river.

The 305mm batteries were among the most modern coast batteries in the world. Each consisted of two twin-gun turrets which, although primarily designed for coast defence, could traverse 360 degrees and were able to fire on inland targets. The guns were the 305mm/52 pieces designed in 1907 by the Obukovskii Works in Petrograd (St Petersburg), originally intended as the main armament for Russian battleships. (Four similar guns were captured by the Germans in Norway in April 1940 and emplaced as Battery Mirus on Guernsey - see *The War in the Channel Islands Then and Now*.)

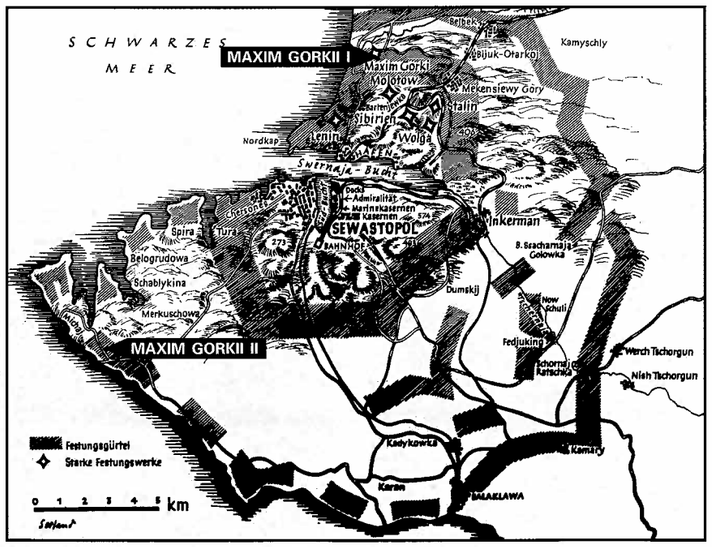
According to Russian sources, the Russian Navy ordered 198 of this type of gun of which 138 — manufactured at two Petrograd gun factories: the Obukovskii (later Putilovski) and the Metallicheskii Works — had been delivered by the time the Revolution took place in 1917. In addition, 36 guns were ordered by the War Council for coast-defence purposes. All but one of these were delivered. During the Soviet period, no new guns were manufactured, only outstanding work on those already begun being completed. In 1921, 14 guns were handed over and a further 29 between 1923 and 1930.

The guns ordered for coast-defence purposes were intended for both single-gun installations and two-gun turrets. Of the 35 delivered, 28 are known to have been deployed as follows:

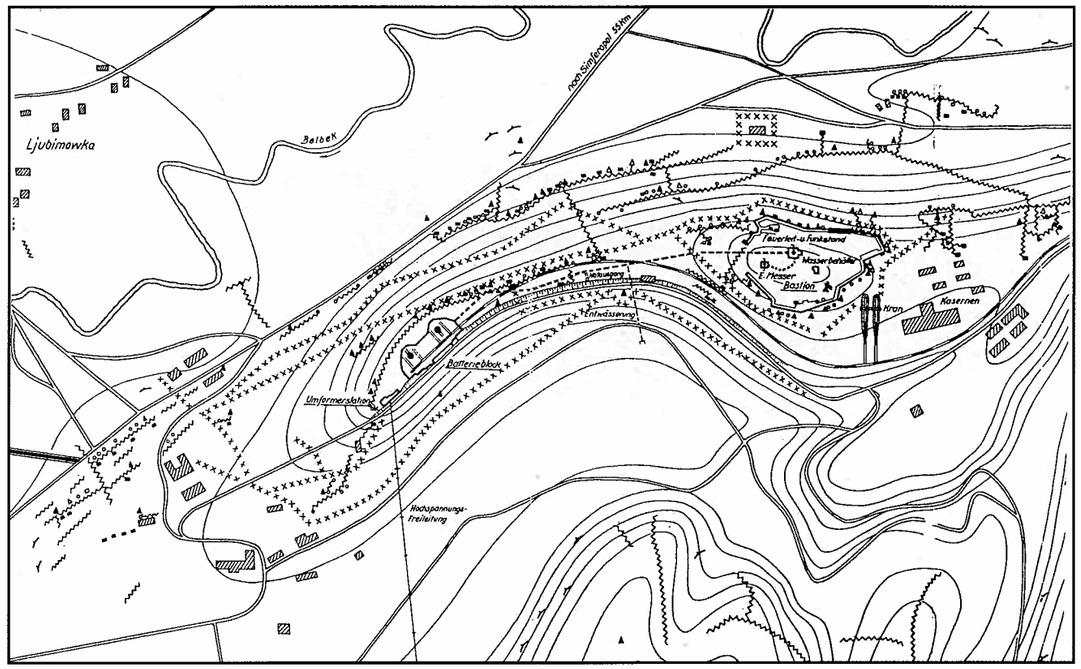
Fortress	*Guns*	*Mountings*	*Completed*
Krasnaya Gorka	4	Single-guns	1913
Krasnaya Gorka	4	Two-gun turrets	1916
Ino	4	Single-guns	1913
Ino	4	Two-gun turrets	1916
Sevastopol	8	Two-gun turrets	1933/34
Ust'-Dvinsk	4	Two-gun turrets	?

During the First World War, 11 additional single-gun mountings were delivered.

Batteries Nos. 30 and 35 both saw their most-important action in the Second World War defending Sevastopol, not against attacks from the sea but against land attack during the eight-month siege of the city by Generaloberst Erich von Manstein's 11. Armee. The Germans had their own code-names for the city's main defences, and they referred to Batteries Nos. 30 and 35 as 'Maxim Gorkii I' and 'Maxim Gorkii II' respectively.



Contemporary German map of Sevastopol, showing the Soviet inner and outer defensive rings and their main fortifications — with the German code-names for them: 'Lenin', 'Stalin', 'Molotow', 'Wolga', 'Siberien' and 'Maxim Gorkii' (i.e Maxim Gorkii I — we have added Maxim Gorkii II, the other 305mm battery defending Sevastopol, located on the Cape Gersones peninsula, south-west of the city). (NIOD)



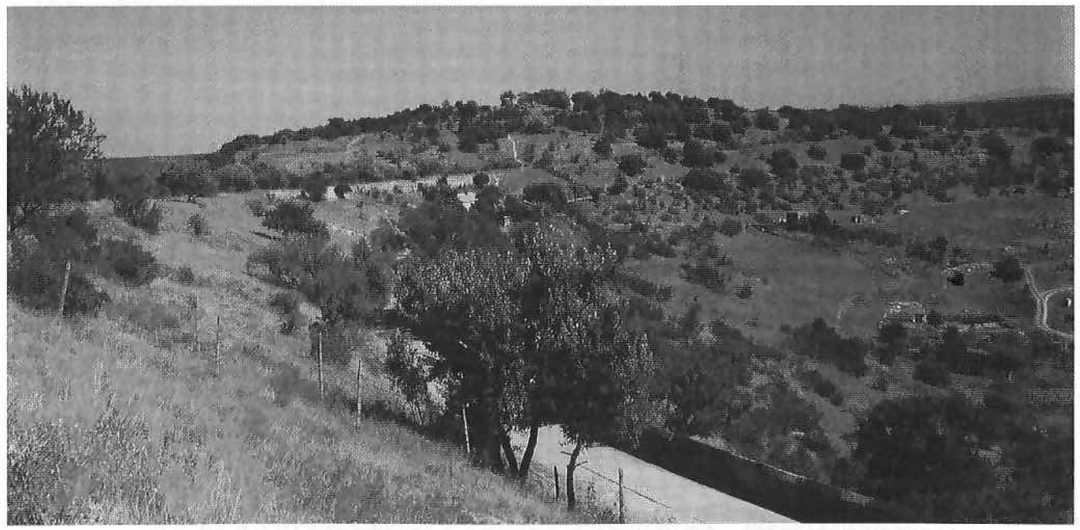
Layout of the Maxim Gorkii I battery. The gun-turret block (Batterieblock) on the left is connected to the fire-control bunker (Feuerleit- und Funkstand), right, by a 600-metre-long underground tunnel (the dotted line). The Germans saw the fire-direction centre as a separate fortification and referred to it as 'The Bastion'. This plan comes from an official German report on foreign fortifications, prepared by the OKW in 1943.

Battery No. 30, commanded by Major Alexander, fired its first mission against the approaching Wehrmacht on October 30, 1941, its long-range guns then and later interfering with the German supply lines through the Belbek valley and the Kamyschly gorge.

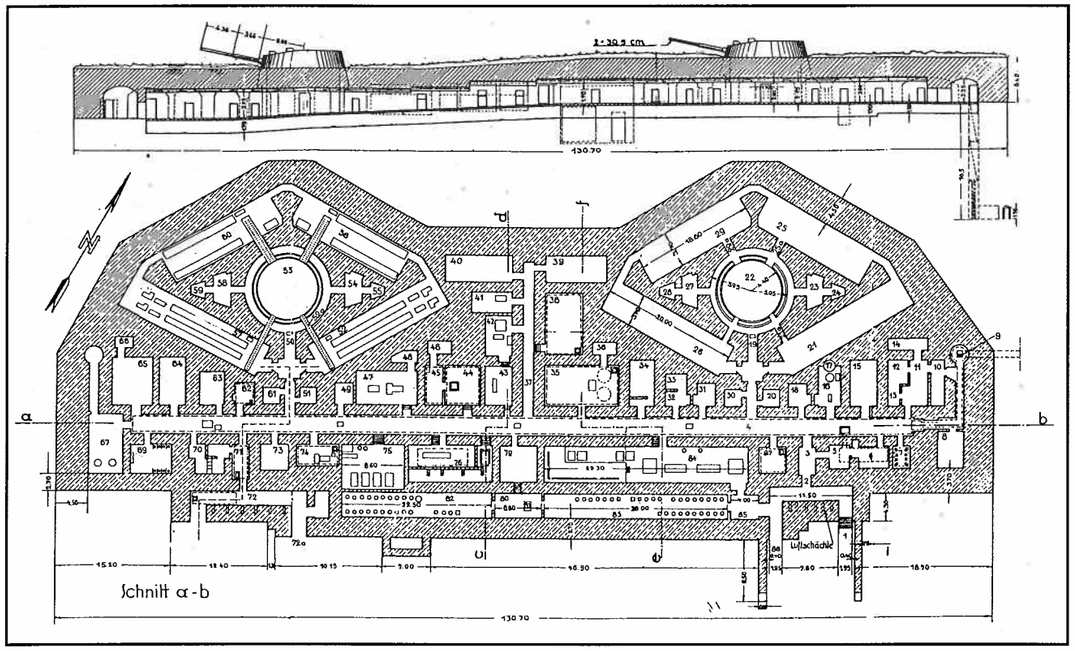
During the first German assault on the city, which lasted from December 17-31, 1941, the battery supported the defence with direct fire, annihilating German troops advancing on the heights across the Belbek valley. The first German attacks on the battery itself occurred on December 29, their first objective being the battery's observation and fire-control bunker 600 metres to the east — a fortification which the Germans called 'the Bastion'. The attack, by Infanterie-Regiment 65 of the 22. Infanterie-Division, failed with heavy losses to the attacker.

With the Soviet amphibious landings in the German rear at Kerch on December 27 and Feodosia on the 29th — a major counter-offensive with which Stalin aimed to recapture the Crimea — the attack on Sevastopol was temporarily called off. Forced to withdraw divisions from Sevastopol to cope with the Soviet counter-strokes further east, the 11. Armee settled down to begin a siege of the encircled city.

The Soviets used the winter respite to improve the city's defences and bring in new troops and supplies. In January 1942, they replaced all four of Battery No. 30's worn-out gun barrels with new ones, each of them having fired some 430-450 shots since 1934, far outlasting the prescribed maximum of 205.



The view today, looking from the turret block to the hill on which lies the Bastion — still the battery's fire-direction centre today. The latter is strictly off limits to visitors, hence no photographs of this heavily embattled position. The embankment of the railway that serviced the turret block can be seen curving towards the camera between the road and the hill.



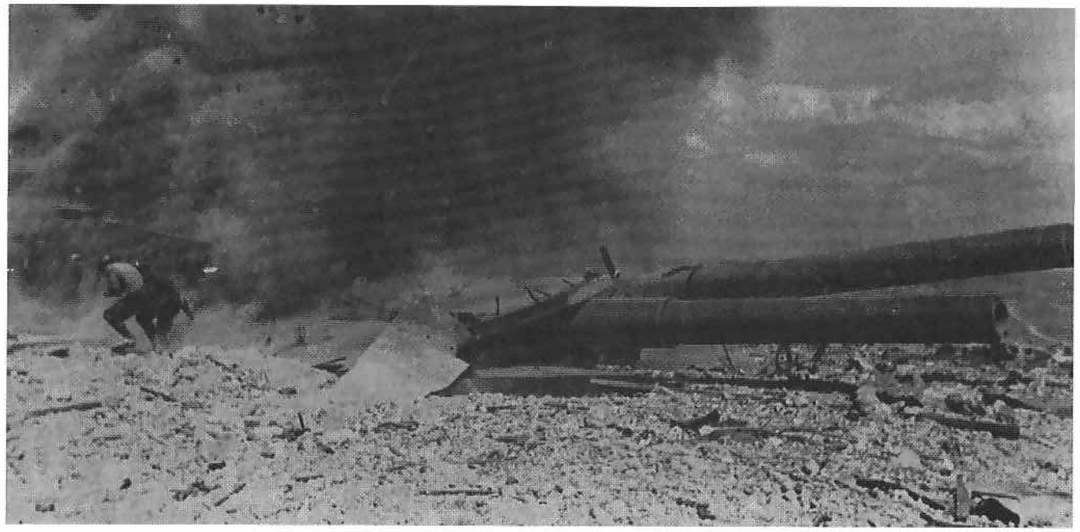
Plan of the gun-turret block. Each turret was surrounded by four ammunition storage rooms. Command post, communication room, generator room, heating, crew billets, kitchen, and other rooms were along a central corridor, at the eastern end of which was an elevator that led down to the tunnel connecting the block with the fire-control bunker. The block's two entrances were in the southern facade. Another plan from the official German pamphlet on foreign fortifications issued in 1943.

The second attack on Sevastopol — Unternehmen 'Storfang' — began on June 2, 1942, with a five-day preparatory shelling by massed artillery. With 1,300 guns along a front line of 35 kilometres, this represented the largest German artillery concentration of the entire war. Among the batteries firing at Maxim Gorkii I were some of the heaviest guns in the world: two 30,5cm M1 mortars, two 60cm Karl self-propelled mortars (named *Thor* and *Odin*) and the 80cm Dora railway gun — the largest-calibre gun ever produced. Between June 6-17, 1942, these beasts hurled a combined total of 750 rounds at the battery. On June 6, one of the Karl mortars scored a hit on the western turret, which knocked out one gun completely and partly disabled the other.

The infantry attack on Sevastopol began on June 7, the main effort being in the north, the sector defended by Battery No. 30, where the only good road and railway line led into the city. The LIV. Armeekorps attacked with four divisions, Maxim Gorkii I and the Bastion being objectives of the 132. Infanterie-Division. Inching forward, the Germans suffered heavy losses against the tenacious Soviet defenders. A first attack on the Bastion by the 132. Division on the 11th was cut to pieces by Soviet flak guns still holding the Belbek valley to the right rear. While the 132. Division battled to secure that flank, Infanterie-Regiment 213 (detached from the 73. Infanterie-Division) took over the Bastion sector.

On the 17th, after several failed attempts, Regiment 213 finally fought its way into the Bastion. While they held the ground, assault engineers of Pionier-Bataillon 132 (with the attached 1. Kompanie of Pionier-Bataillon 173) under Major Roettig proceeded to systematically blow up the position's concrete bunkers, dug-outs, and other fortifications. The Soviets counter-attacked and reoccupied part of the Bastion but, with help from the assault engineers, Regiment 213 managed to drive them out again.

By June 17, 1942, the German attackers had fought their way close enough to the battery block for assault engineers of Pionier-Bataillon 173 to launch the final assault. Here, two of them have crept to within yards of the eastern gun turret. A few hours earlier, a Stuka bomb had hit this turret knocking out both guns. The assault engineers finished the job by throwing in demolition charges to eliminate the defenders inside. (NIOD)



June 18, and the same turret is being 'smoked out'. A spectacular picture taken by German PK photographer Augustin. (NIOD)

Now, the Germans prepared for the final attack on Maxim Gorkii I itself. To pave the way, the turret block was again subjected to heavy shelling, including another five 80cm rounds from Dora, and dive-bombing attacks by some 20 Stukas. One bomb hit the intact eastern turret, putting both its 305mm guns out of action but the battery garrison prepared to fight on with small arms.

At 1430 hours, III. Bataillon of Infanterie-Regiment 132 (reduced to 90 men) and 1. Kompanie of Pionier-Bataillon 173 (a mere 48 men) began the attack on the turret block, setting out from the Bastion. Advancing under strong machine-gun and mortar fire, by 1515 the infantry had reached a position 400 metres from the turrets. Now it was the turn of the assault engineers. Crawling forward from one bomb crater to another, six-man teams under Leutnant Bacherl got close enough to throw in demolition charges and hand-grenades through the gaps in the turrets, eliminating the defenders or driving them deeper inside. With another charge, they disabled the last intact gun in the western turret. All four of the battery's 305mm guns were now silent. Since June 7, they had fired 700 rounds in support of the Soviet defence. German losses on the 17th were heavy: the assault engineers alone had lost seven men killed and 47 wounded.

Although it was now hopelessly cut off and cooped up in the battery's interior, the Soviet garrison refused to surrender. As he did not know the precise layout of the underground installation, the German engineer company commander, Oberleutnant Strobel, judged an attack into the fortress block too risky, so he decided to smoke and burn the defenders out.

Early next day (June 18), his men blew a one-metre gap in the gun platform of the western turret. Next, they poured 300 litres of petrol through the hole, igniting it with a flare. The resulting fire caused a huge explosion inside, probably the gunpowder charges blowing up, which led to thick clouds of smoke billowing up from the turret. Two Russians, completely soot-covered and with grievous burns, emerged from one of the entrances to give themselves up. Under interrogation they said the whole garrison wanted to surrender but was refrained from doing so at gunpoint by political commissars.

Pouring fuel in the other, eastern turret was impossible as open fires were already burning near it, so instead the German engineers lowered drums filled with fuel on to the gun platform and ignited them with demolition charges. The result was unsatisfactory, as the burning fuel did not seep deep enough into the lower rooms and harmlessly burned itself out.

Correctly suspecting that an underground tunnel connected the turret block with the fire-control bunker, the Germans meanwhile closed that escape route by blocking the latter's exit with heavy rocks.

On the 19th, the engineers placed 500kg of explosive six metres below the western gun platform. Its detonation hurled the armoured roof of the turret five metres away, lifted one of the gun barrels from its cradle putting it at a 45-degree angle upwards, and left the entire turret askew. Shortly after, seven Russian soldiers came out to surrender. A little later, as the demolitions continued, a Caucasian who spoke a little German emerged and offered the surrender of part of the garrison. After a promise that they would not be shot, 117 Soviet soldiers, including two lieutenants, came out — all totally blackened, some with serious burn wounds. According to them, some 114 others, including a major, a commissar, several officers, six medical nurses and one child, remained inside — about half of them wounded, half of them dead. According to the prisoners, the wave of detonations had blown open all interior doors although the emergency lighting inside still functioned as did the underground telephone line with headquarters in Sevastopol.

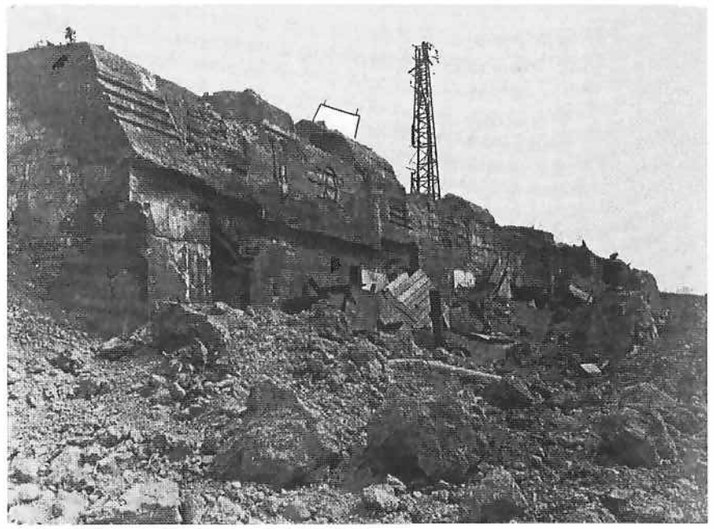
Looking from the shattered lower (western) turret towards the upper (eastern) turret. On June 6, one of the German giant 60cm Karl mortars had scored a direct hit on the western turret, which knocked out one of its guns and partly disabled the other. On June 17, the assault engineers neutralised the second gun by throwing a demolition charge into the turret. The left-hand barrel ended up at a 45-degree angle when the Germans detonated 500kg of explosives underneath the gun platform on the 19th. The landscape around the battery shows the effect of the several days of preparatory bombardment by artillery and Stukas. Picture by PK photographer Rauchvetter. (NIOD)

Next day, the Germans continued their efforts to smoke out the remaining Russians. As the engineers were piling up explosives 13 metres below the gun platforms — 230kg in each turret — and making ready fuel for pouring in the hoped-for gaps, the Russians detonated a 'counter-explosion' from deeper down in the western turret which ignited the fuel and blew up the Germans' own charges there. One engineer officer was killed and three other men injured, two of them fatally. The 230kg of explosive in the eastern turret was ignited as planned, which started a fire and produced much smoke. At 1800 hours, a violent knocking and hammering was heard at the eastern entrance door, but a call to surrender shouted by one of the Russian prisoners was answered with rifle fire.

Early on the 21st, two utterly blackened Russians emerged from the western exit. They declared that the upper storeys of the fortification were still afire; that some 120 soldiers, including the officers, the women and the child had burned to death or been suffocated; and that they had wanted to surrender earlier but been prevented from opening the doors by gun-fire from within.

Fires and smoke continued to billow from the gun turrets and entrance doors all through the 22nd. That evening, Pionier-Bataillon 173 handed over the beleaguered site to 3. Kompanie of Pionier-Bataillon 24. The operation to clean out the battery's interior continued for another few days, the last Russian soldiers not surrendering until the 26th. The battery commander, Captain Alexander, (according to German reports) was found wearing civilian clothes and hiding arms under it and, after a short interrogation, was shot. (According to the official Soviet propaganda version, he was betrayed to the Germans by Tatar collaborators and held imprisoned at Simferopol until 1944, when the Germans executed him just as the Red Army was reconquering the Crimea.)

The battle for Sevastopol continued for another three weeks, the last Soviet units not surrendering until July 12. Battery No. 30's twin battery, No. 35 (Maxim Gorkii II), fought on until July 2, when it was blown up by its crew. The Germans occupied the destroyed site a week later.



Rocks and debris obstruct the entrances to the battery block. With all guns silenced, and their escape route via the tunnel blocked by the Germans, the 230-strong Russian garrison was bottled up inside the fortification. Those wanting to surrender were kept from doing so at gunpoint by political commissars, and it was three days before they came out. By then, half the garrison was dead. Picture by PK photographer Horter. (NIOD)

The gun casemate of Maxim Gorkii I was deeply entrenched in the rock and its concrete walls were several metres thick. Another picture by PK photographer Rauchvetter. (NIOD)

After the battle, the assault engineers look down from the roof of the battery block. This picture was taken by an SS-PK photographer, Gayk. (NIOD)

The fighting over, officers and men inspect the powerful guns of the eastern turret. Picture by PK photographer Roßbach. (NIOD)

Unlike many countries, the Soviet Union did not abandon coast artillery at the end of World War II. In 1948 the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union decided to restore Battery No. 30 and the armament chosen came from a battleship which had lain in store for more than ten years.

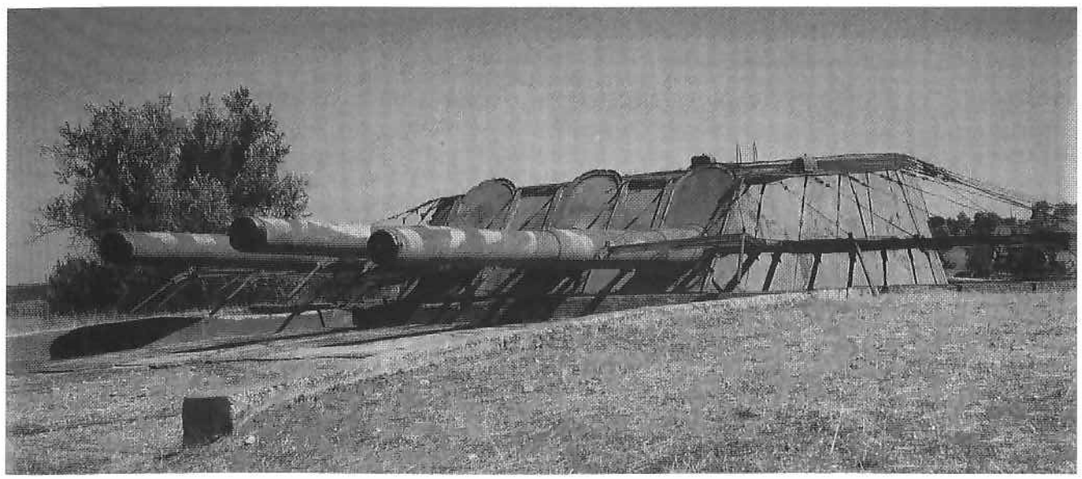
Prior to the 1917 Revolution, the Russians had constructed seven battleships of the Gangut and Imperiatritsa Mariya classes, each armed with 12 305mm/52 guns in four three-gun turrets. One of these battleships, the *Poltava* of the Gangut class, survived the First World War but was mothballed at the Admiralty Yard at Petrograd in late 1918. In May 1919 the vessel (renamed the *Frunze*) was brought back into service when she fired 25 rounds from each gun of two turrets to shell the counter-revolutionary White forces led by Marshal Yudenich.

In November of that year, a fire broke out in a boiler room, burning for 15 hours and damaging the ship so badly that she was found to be not worth repairing. Six years later it was decided to disarm her and the four three-gun turrets were removed and put into storage. Two of them were later installed on Russky Island not far from Vladivostok in Battery No. 981, the first coming into service in 1933 and the second in 1934.

At the end of the Winter War between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1939-40, the Russians occupied the Hangö area in southern Finland, and it was here that they planned to install the two remaining turrets from the *Poltava*. However, the work had not started when the Continuation War between Finland and the Soviet Union broke out in June 1941. Now, after World War II, the two turrets were to be used to rebuild Battery No. 30 at Sevastopol.

The battery was restored between 1950 and 1952 and brought into service in 1954. The new construction consisted of the main battery position where the two turrets were installed and the original fire-control post 600 metres to the east. The basic structure and layout of the main battery block remained the same as the original but the thickness of the concrete was increased to between five and six metres. In addition, the surrounding land was raised and relandscaped so that now the ammunition store is approximately 25 metres below ground compared to the seven metres when the battery was originally constructed. The main battery block, measuring 150 x 350 metres, contains the accommodation and logistics for the crew and all necessary services such as power, communication, workshops, storage and ammunition. Each turret has two shell and two air-conditioned cartridge magazines.

The original Russian nomenclature of the turrets was MB-3-12 but after modernisation in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the installations received the designation MB-3-12FM. The most important change was to increase the elevation from +25 degrees to +40 degrees which obviously improved the range of the guns. The guns in the turrets were manufactured between 1911 and 1917 and the barrels relined between 1940 and 1942. From outside, the turret can be entered through a hatch at the rear and until recently they were covered in camouflage netting.



The eastern turret today, a nice comparison showing the main difference between the 'old' and the 'new' battery: although the type of gun — 305mm/52 M1910-1914 — is still the same, the present-day MB-3-12FM turret mounts three instead of two of them, and allows for a higher gun elevation too. Note the scaffolding for camouflage netting around the turret.

Today, visitors enter the block on the east side. After passing through a gas lock and heavy armoured doors, one reaches the central aisle some 120 metres long. The interior resembles a warship with steel doors painted grey.

The shell stores are impressive with hundreds of live rounds stacked on shelves. These shells are moved by a gravity conveyor to each turret through a secure hatch in the bulkhead. The propellant charges arrive from the opposite side. The shells and the charges are then loaded into the same hoist and raised up to the loading compartment.

The fire-control centre is located east of the main battery with which it is still connected through the 600-metres-long tunnel. When the battery was restored, the fire control was also modernised and gun-laying radar added in 1953.

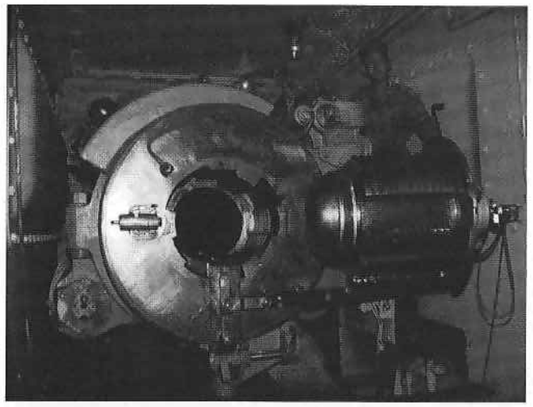
The designation of this battery and of the unit holding it has changed several times: from Battery No. 26 to Battery No. 30; and from the 3rd Battalion of the 346th Coast Defence Missile and Artillery Regiment to the 459th Independent Turret Artillery Battalion of the 951st Coast Defence Regiment.

A small museum has been established in the main battery block commemorating the history of the battery and the siege of Sevastopol in 1942.

When the Ukraine gained its independence from Russia in 1991, Battery Maxim Gorkii I became one of the Russian military installations on foreign soil, still looked after by a Russian care and maintainance crew. However, the Russians and Ukrainians are discussing the future of the battery and the possibility of preserving it permanently as a military museum. (The two three-gun turrets of Battery No. 981 at Vladivostok have been given up but remain in situ.)

Even though Battery Maxim Gorkii I is still a military installation it is now possible for organised groups to visit the battery with special permission from the military authorities.

The entrance to the gun casemate as it is today. Compare with the picture at the top of page 50. The exterior facade looks different because an extra layer of concrete was added in 1950-52 to increase strength. All present-day photos by Svein Wiiger Olsen.



The 305mm/52 gun has a screw-type breech block.

305mm/52 M1910-1914 GUN

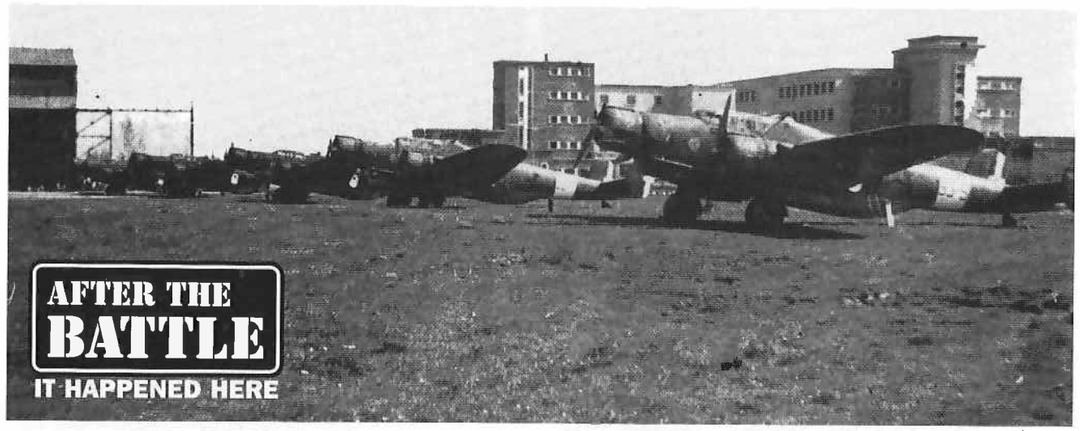
Bore:	305mm
Weight incl. breech mechanism:	51.85 tons
Length overall:	15900mm
Length bore:	15419mm
Length rifling:	12912mm
Length chamber:	2391,5mm
Grooves:	72
Weight projectile:	470,9 kg
Propellant charge:	157 kg
Muzzle velocity:	762 m/s
Breech mechanism:	Screw breech block
Rate of fire per barrel:	1 round in 40 seconds

MB-3-12FM TURRET DATA

Weight:	Approx. 709 tons
Train:	360 degrees
Elevation range:	-3 degrees/+40 degrees
Turret shield face:	203mm
Turret shield side:	150mm
Turret shield roof:	76mm
Turret shield rear:	305mm

Each turret has two shell storage rooms.

The battery museum, mainly dedicated to the 1941-42 battles.

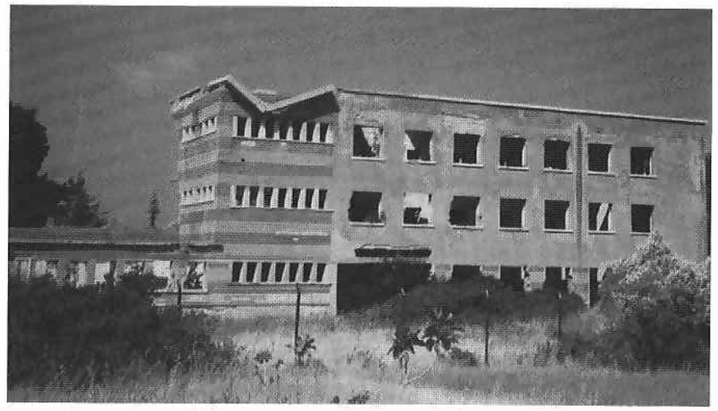


RE-ENACTING OPERATION 'ANGLO'

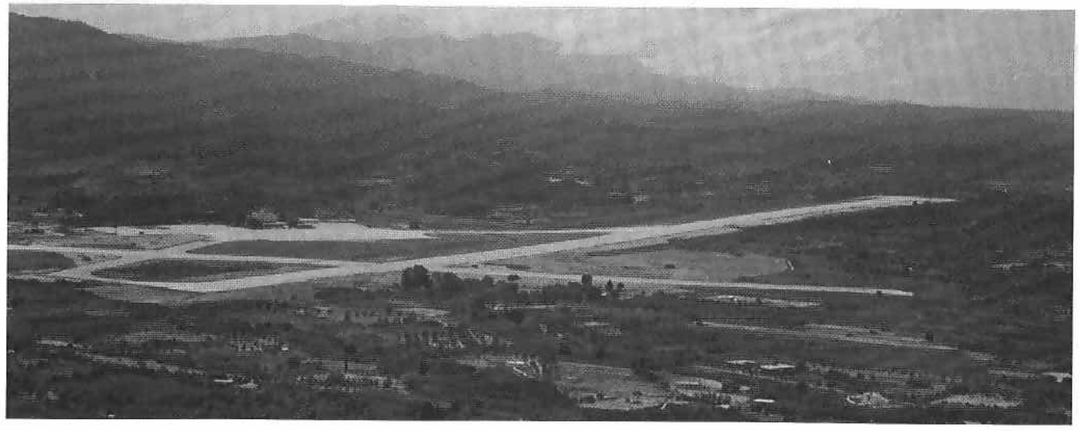
By Dr Peter Schenk

After the German invasion of Crete in May 1941 and the Axis successes in the North African campaign, British commando raids were ordered to try to reduce Axis air power in the Mediterranean theatre of war. The first such operations against Axis airfields were carried out on June 12, 1942 in order to ease the passage of an important convoy to Malta. The Special Air Service (SAS) destroyed 20 Axis aircraft in Libya and the Special Boat Squadron (SBS) another 29 at Iraklion in Crete. (Lord George Jellicoe was the only one to return from the latter raid.)

The next operation, code-named 'Anglo', had as its targets two airfields on Rhodes which threatened Allied supply lines to North Africa. A party of 12 members of the SBS under the command of Captain R. K. B. Allott left Beirut on board the Greek submarine *Papanikolis* on August 31, and on the night of September 4/5 the party left the submarine in a folding boat and three inflatable rafts and landed on a small stretch of beach near Cape Faraklos, north of Lindos on the eastern side of Rhodes. The boats were hidden and the party spent the rest of the night and the next day in a nearby cave. Two night marches followed but with little progress made due to lack of local knowledge by the Greek guides, Nikolas Savvas and Giorgos Kyrmichalis, and the poor physical condition of the two Greek interpreters. As a result, the party separated for their two targets, Captain Allott with Kyrmichalis and three men of the SBS setting out on the night of September 7/8 on a five-night march to the airfield of Maritsa, while Lieutenant David Sutherland took Savvas, the interpreter, Lieutenant Kalampochidis, and three more SBS men to the nearer airfield of Gadurra/Kalathos. (The second interpreter, Tsouchas, was left behind.)



Top: **Target for the SBS raid in September 1942: Maritsa airfield at the northern end of Rhodes. (Kogiopoulos).** *Below:* **The airfield is now only used as a landing ground for fire-fighting aircraft, the derelict buildings** *(above)* **still bearing their scars of war.**



The second target of the Special Boat Squadron operation was Gadurra/Kalathos airfield of which little remains today save the weed-strewn runway *(left)*, now bisected by the main road from Rhodes to Lindos, and the crumbling control tower *(right)*.

The attack on the two airfields took place simultaneously on the night of September 12/13. The Gadurra group split up with Sutherland and Marine Duggan infiltrating the airfield defences from the north-west and the second party with Lieutenant Kalampochidis and two marines approaching from the north-east. The night was very dark with heavy rain. Sutherland and Duggan were just able to place explosives on three SM84s when they were interrupted by a sentry but, before withdrawing, they managed to mine a petrol dump. Their bombs exploded two hours later followed by those of the other party.

On reaching the rendezvous point they met Savvas but at around 4 a.m. small-arms fire was heard and flashes seen indicating that the other group had been discovered. On the return journey, Savvas finally had to be left behind as he was frequently insisting on taking cover when searchlights were seen.

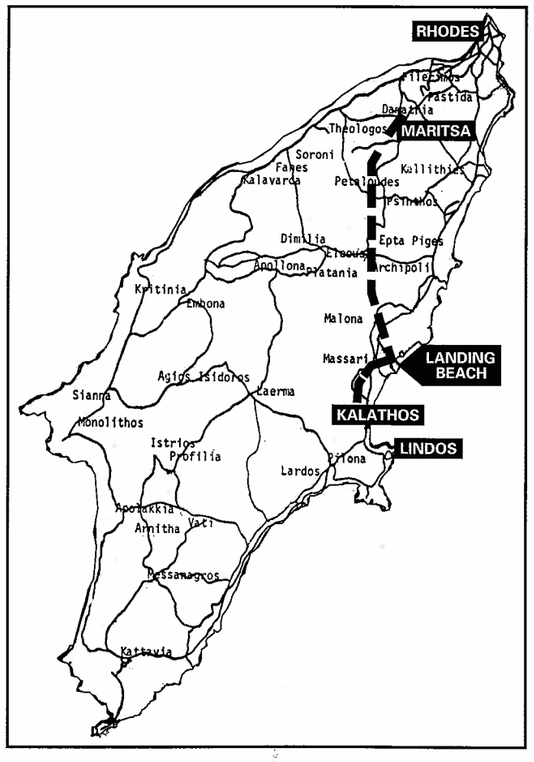
The next night, Sutherland and Duggan met up with Tsouchas. At one point they had to make a quick detour up the slope of Mt Elias to avoid a group of Italian soldiers combing the area but, although the nearest soldier passed by only ten yards below them, they were not discovered. Later that day they saw an Italian MTB with their rubber floats in tow.

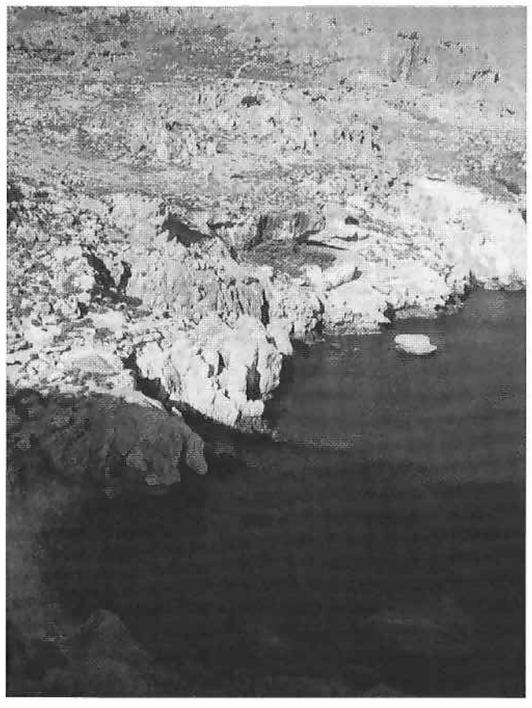
On the night of the 16th/17th, Sutherland and Duggan left Tsouchas to check on a cave to be used as a rendezvous but on returning they heard Italian voices and saw flashlights coming from the direction where they had left Tsouchas. They avoided being detected and hid up during the day but Tsouchas was not seen again.

The next night was the date scheduled for the rendezvous with the submarine so Sutherland and Duggan moved to the coast and signalled with a torch. Their flashes were acknowledged by the submerged submarine through its periscope so they entered the water and swam for an hour until they spotted the submarine *Traveller*, now surfaced, and were taken on board. Shortly afterwards an Italian MTB which was patrolling the area, carried out an attack with depth-charges but *Traveller* reached Beirut safely on September 20.

Meanwhile, all the other members of Operation 'Anglo' had been taken prisoner. Savvas and Kyrmichalis, who were Italian citizens from the Dodecanese islands, were charged with treason and Savvas executed on October 7. Kyrmichalis was imprisoned in solitary confinement in Italy and returned home in ill-health at the end of the war. He died in 1949. Both men are now regarded as the greatest heroes of the Greek resistance movement on Rhodes.

Some Italian sources give the total number of aircraft destroyed as 15 but the official report states eight destroyed and one slightly damaged at Gadurra, with one damaged and one destroyed at Maritsa.





The landing beach on the eastern side of the island was just — miles north of Kalathos near Cape Faraklos in Malona Bay.

Left: **Our author, Dr Peter Schenk (centre) with Lord Jellicoe (left) and David Sutherland in Rhodes for the re-enactment in September 1999.** *Right:* **Lord Jellicoe, President of the SBS Association, lays a wreath at the Greek memorial.**

In September 1999, to commemorate the operation, a group of former members of the SAS and SBS, among them David Sutherland and Lord George Jellicoe, along with present-day members of the SAS, visited Rhodes for a wreath-laying ceremony. This took place on September 18 at the memorial for Greek war dead beside the harbour and was followed by a ceremony at the memorial for Savvas and Kyrmichalis in the town.

The next day a re-enactment of Operation 'Anglo' was staged on a beach near the spot where the commandos had landed 57 years before. Eight SAS men, dressed in original-style uniforms and with blackened faces, played the members of the commando using four folding boats which had been brought along from Britain. The group of SAS and SBS veterans with their wives watched from the shade of the tent of a beach café with Major Frank Smith (SAS) giving the explanations of what had happened here in September 1942.

In the broad sunlight of the Greek afternoon the boats appeared approaching the shore from round a cape. On hitting the beach, the first boat was quickly drawn between the rocks and one commando then waved up the next in line. With all boats ashore, the group then started on its way inland . . . then a time-leap of 13 days was announced and the two commandos playing Sutherland and Duggan were seen coming down the rocks to the beach, giving signals with a torch, and entering the water. A motor boat stood in for the submarine which subsequently brought the two swimmers back to the beach.

Re-enacting the landing on the same beach by present-day members of the SAS.

On September 20, the group proceeded to Leros by hydrofoil to commemorate the fierce battle which took place there in November 1943 in which commandos from the Long Range Desert Group and SBS, among them Lord Jellicoe, took part (see *After the Battle* No. 90). On the night of June 17/18, 1944, an SBS commando with three folding boats had entered the harbour of Portolago (today Lakki) and damaged the German-operated, ex-Italian destroyers *TA 14* and *TA 17* and sank an armed motor fishing vessel along with a tug. The raiders made a successful departure and were picked up by an MTB.

During the German retreat from Greece in the autumn of 1944, they were not able to evacuate all their troops from the outer islands. Crete and Milos, Rhodes, Kos, Leros and Kalymnos all remained occupied until May 8, 1945. The German commander of the Eastern Aegean, Generalmajor Dr Otto Wagener, was a high-ranking member of the National Socialist Party and he sent Hitler fresh produce, lemons and oranges, etc, from Rhodes with the mail plane for his birthday in 1945 even though the men under his command were short of food. True to the end, Wagener held a last birthday parade for the Führer in Rhodes town on April 20.

Loyal to the bitter end: Generalmajor Dr Otto Wagener takes the salute at the last parade on Rhodes in honour of Hitler's birthday.